

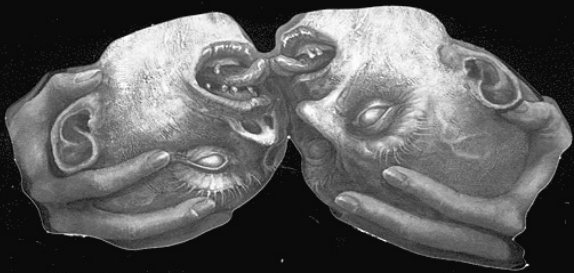
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"HE IS A MAPMAKER OF THE MIND, CHARTING THE FARTHEST REACHES OF THE IMAGINATION."—THE WASHINGTON TIMES

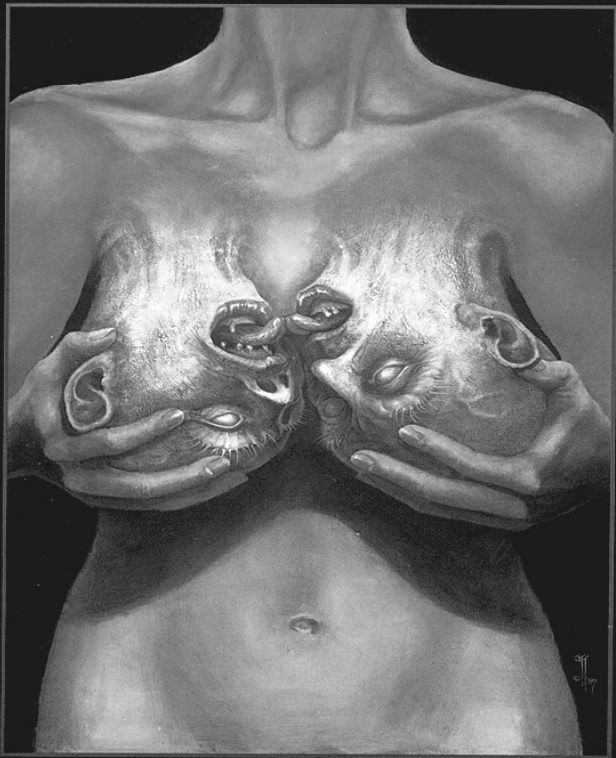
OB

CLIVE BARKER



TAPPING THE VEIN

BOOK
FOUR





TAPPING THE VEIN

CLIVE
BARKER

TITAN  BOOKS

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HELL'S EVENT

**Illustrated by Steven E. Johnson,
Alan Okamoto, and Jim Pearson
Adapted by Fred Burke
Lettered by Bill Pearson**



THE MADONNA

**Pencilled by Stan Woch
Inked by Mark Farmer
Painted by Fred Von Tobel
Adapted by Fred Burke
Lettered by Bill Pearson**



HELL CAME UP TO THE STREETS AND SQUARES OF LONDON THAT SEPTEMBER, ICY FROM THE DEPTHS OF THE NINTH CIRCLE, TOO FROZEN TO BE WARNED EVEN BY THE SWIFTER OF AN INDIAN SUMMER. IT HAD LAID ITS PLANS AS CAREFULLY AS EVER, PLANS BEING WHAT THEY WERE, AND FRAGILE.

THIS TIME IT WAS PERHAPS A LITTLE MORE FINICKY THAN USUAL, CHECKING EVERY LAST DETAIL TWICE OR THREE TIMES, TO BE CERTAIN IT HAD EVERY CHANCE OF WINNING THIS VITAL GAME.

IT HAD NEVER LACKED COMPETITIVE SPIRIT; IT HAD MATCHED FIRE AGAINST FLESH A THOUSAND THOUSAND TIMES DOWN THE CENTURIES, SOMETIMES WINNING, MORE OFTEN LOSING. WAGERS WERE. AFTER ALL, THE STURE OF ITS ADVANCEMENT, WITHOUT THE HUMAN URGE TO COMPETE, TO BARGAIN, AND TO BET, DEMONSTRUM HAD WELL HAVE FALLEN FOR WANT OF CITIZENS.

DANCING, DOG RACING, FIDDLE-PLAYING: IT WAS ALL ONE TO THE DEVILS. ALL A GAME IN WHICH IT MIGHT, IF IT PLAYED WITH SUFFICIENT WIT, GARNER A SOUL OR TWO. THAT WAS WHY HELL CAME UP TO LONDON THAT BRIGHT BLUE DAY TO RUN A RACE, AND TO WIN, IF IT COULD, ENOUGH SOULS TO KEEP IT BUSY WITH PERDITION ANOTHER AGE.

HELL'S EVENT



THE VOICE OF THE COMMENTATOR FLARED AS THOUGH HE WAS SPEAKING FROM THE POLE INSTEAD OF ST. PAUL'S CATHEDRAL. IT WAS STILL A GOOD HALF-HOUR BEFORE THE RACE BEGAN, BUT CAMERON WANTED TO LISTEN TO THE WARM-UP COMMENTARY, JUST TO HEAR WHAT THEY WERE SAYING ABOUT HIS BOY.

...BEEN CALLED THE RACE OF THE YEAR, AND WHAT A DAY IT IS! ISN'T IT, JIM?

...ATMOSPHERE IS ELECTRIC... PROBABLY TENS OF THOUSANDS ALONG THE ROUTE...

IT CERTAINLY IS, MIKE.

THAT'S BIG JIM DELANEY, WHO'S UP THERE IN THE EYE IN THE SKY, AND HE'LL BE FOLLOWING THE RACE ALONG THE ROUTE, GIVING US A BIRD'S EYE VIEW, WON'T YOU, JIM?

CERTAINLY WILL, MIKE.

WELL, THERE'S A LOT OF ACTIVITY BEHIND THE LINE... THE COMPETITORS ARE ALL LOOSENING UP FOR THE START...

...I CAN'T SEE NICK LOVER THERE. HE'S WEARING NUMBER THREE, HE SAID TO ME WHEN HE ARRIVED HE DIDN'T USUALLY LIKE TO RUN ON SUNDAYS, BUT HE'S MADE AN EXCEPTION FOR THIS RACE, BECAUSE OF COURSE IT'S A CHARITY EVENT, AND ALL THE PROCEEDS WILL BE GOING TO CANCER RESEARCH.

JOEL JONES, OUR GOLD MEDALIST IN THE 800 METERS, IS HERE, AND HE'LL BE RUNNING AGAINST HIS GREAT RIVAL, FRANK MC CLOUD.

WEARING NUMBER FIVE IS THE SOUTH AFRICAN, MALCOLM VOUGHT, AND COMPLETING THE FIELD IS LESTER KINDERMAN, WHO WAS OF COURSE THE SURPRISE WINNER OF THE MARATHON IN AUSTRIA LAST YEAR.

AND I MUST SAY THEY ALL LOOK FRESH AS DAISIES ON THIS SUPERB SEPTEMBER AFTERNOON. COULDN'T ASK FOR A BETTER DAY, COULD WE, JIM?

JOEL HAD WOKEN WITH BAD DREAMS.

YOU'LL BE FINE - STOP RESTING.

BUT HE DIDN'T FEEL FINE! HE FELT SICK IN THE PIT OF HIS STOMACH, NOT PRE-RACE NERVES! HE WAS USED TO THOSE, AND HE COULD DEAL WITH THE FEELING, TWO FINGERS DOWN THE THROAT AND THEN UP, THAT WAS THE BEST REMEDY HE'D FOUND! GET IT OVER AND DONE WITH.

NO, THIS WASN'T PRE-RACE NERVES, OR ANYTHING LIKE THEM. IT WAS DEEPER, FOR A START AS THOUGH HIS BOWELS TO HIS CENTER, TO HIS SOURCE, WERE LOOSING.

IT'S A CHARITY RACE, NOT THE OLYMPICS! ACT YOUR AGE.

THAT WAS CAMERON'S TECHNIQUE. HIS MELLOW VOICE HAD MADE FOR COACHING, BUT WAS USED TO BULLY, WITHOUT THAT BULLYING, THERE WOULD HAVE BEEN NO GOLD MEDALS, NO CHEERING CROWDS, NO ADMIRING GIRLS.

THEY LOVE YOU. GOD KNOWS WHY - THEY LOVE YOU.

YOU'LL BE ALL RIGHT, SON. GET OUT AND RUN FOR YOUR LIFE.

NOW, IN THE BROAD DAYLIGHT, JOEL LOOKED AT THE REST OF THE FIELD AND FELT A LITTLE MORE SUAVANT.



KINDERMAN HAD STAMINA, BUT NO FINISHING POWER OVER MIDDLE-DISTANCE MARATHON TECHNIQUE WAS A DIFFERENT SKILL ALTOGETHER.



LOYER WAS GOOD, BUT THIS WASN'T REALLY HIS DISTANCE EITHER.

HE WAS A KIDDER, AND A SOMETIMES SPRINTS. 400 METERS WAS HIS LIMIT AND EVEN THEN HE WASN'T HAPPY.



VOIGHT, THE SOUTH AFRICAN—WELL, THERE WASN'T MUCH INFORMATION ON HIM. OBVIOUSLY SOMEONE TO WATCH OUT FOR, JUST IN CASE HE SPRUNG A SURPRISE.



BUT THE REAL PROBLEM OF THE RACE WAS MCCLLOUD. JOEL HAD RUN AGAINST FRANK MCCLLOUD THREE TIMES, TWICE BEATEN HIM INTO SECOND PLACE, ONCE (PAINFULLY) HAD THE POSITION REVERSED. FRANKIE BOY HAD A NEW SCORNS TO SETTLE, ESPECIALLY THE OLYMPICS DEFEAT. HE HADN'T LIKED TAKING THE SILVER. FRANK WAS THE MAN TO WATCH, NO DOUBT OF IT.



FOR A MOMENT, JOEL CAUGHT VOIGHT STARING AT HIM. UNUSUAL. THAT. COMPETITORS SELDOM EVEN GLANCED AT EACH OTHER BEFORE A RACE—IT WAS A KIND OF COYNESS.



WHEN THEIR EYES MET, VOIGHT LOOKED AWAY. THE CRUCIFIX HE WAS WEARING GLINTED GOLD AS IT SWUNG GENTLY BENEATH HIS CHIN.

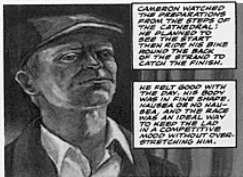


JOEL HAD A GOOD LUCK CHARM WITH HIM, TOO.



TUCKED INTO THE WAISTBAND OF HIS SHORTS, A LOCK OF HIS MOTHER'S HAIR, WHICH SHE HAD PLAITED FOR HIM HALF A DECADE AGO, BEFORE HIS FIRST MAJOR RACE.

SHE HAD RETURNED TO BARBADOS THE FOLLOWING YEAR, AND DIED THERE. A GREAT GRIEF, AN UNFORGETTABLE LOSS. WITHOUT CAMERON, HE WOULD HAVE CRUMBLLED.



CAMERON WATCHED THE PREPARATIONS FROM THE STEPS OF THE CATHEDRAL. HE PLANNED TO SEE THE START, THEN RIDE HIS BIKE ROUND THE BACK OF THE STRAND TO CATCH THE FINISH.

HE FELT GOOD WITH THE DAY. HIS BODY WAS IN FINE SHAPE, NALUREA OR NO NALUREA AND THE RACE WAS AN IDEAL WAY TO KEEP THE LAD IN A COMPETITIVE MOOD WITHOUT OVER-STRETCHING HIM.



IT WAS QUITE A DISTANCE, OF COURSE, ACROSS LUDGATE CIRCUS, ALONG FLEET STREET AND PAST TEMPLE BAR INTO THE STRAND, THEN CUTTING ACROSS THE CORNER OF TRAFALGAR SQUARE AND DOWN WHITEHALL TO THE HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT, RUNNING ON TARMAC TOO, BUT IT WAS A GOOD EXPERIENCE FOR JOEL, AND IT WOULD PRESSURE HIM A LITTLE, WHICH WAS USEFUL.

THERE WAS A DISTANCE RUNNER IN THE BOY, AND CAMERON KNEW IT. HE'D NEVER BEEN A SPRINTER; HE COULDN'T PACE HIMSELF ACCURATELY ENOUGH. HE NEEDED A DISTANCE AND TIME TO FIND HIS PULSE, TO SETTLE DOWN AND TO WORK OUT HIS TACTICS.



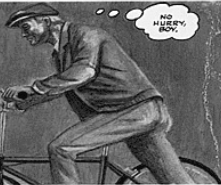
BUT WHAT JOEL HAD WAS COURAGE. COURAGE HAD WON HIM THE OLYMPIC GOLD, AND COURAGE WOULD TAKE HIM FIRST TO THE FINISH AGAIN AND AGAIN. THAT'S WHAT MADE JOEL DIFFERENT.

ANY NUMBER OF TECHNICAL WHIZ KIDS CAME AND WENT, BUT WITHOUT COURAGE TO SUPPLEMENT THOSE SKILLS THEY WENT FOR ALMOST NOTHING. TO RISK WHEN IT WAS WORTH RISKING, TO RUN 'TIL THE PAIN BLINDED YOU, THAT WAS SPECIAL, AND CAMERON KNEW IT. HE LIKED TO THINK HE'D HAD A LITTLE OF IT HIMSELF.

THE STARTER'S GUN WOKE THE PIGEONS FROM THE DOME OF ST. PAUL'S AND THEY ROSE IN A CHATTERING CONGREGATION, THEIR WORSHIP INTERRUPTED.

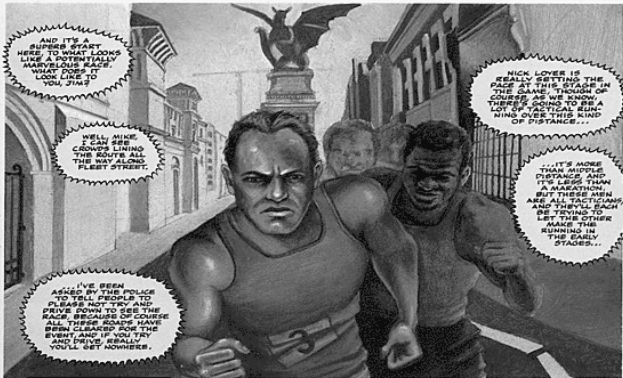


CAMERON'S BICYCLE WAS CHAINED UP IN PATER-NOSTER ROW, A MINUTE'S WALK FROM THE SQUARE.



NO HURRY, BOY.

HE'D ALWAYS HATED CARS... GOOLERS THINGS, CRIPPLING, UNCHRISTIAN THINGS. WITH A BIKE YOU WERE YOUR OWN MASTER. WASN'T THAT ALL A MAN COULD ASK?



AND IT'S A
SUPERB START
HERE. TO WHAT LOOKS
LIKE A POTENTIALLY
MARVELOUS RACE.
WHAT DOES IT
LOOK LIKE TO
YOU, JIM?

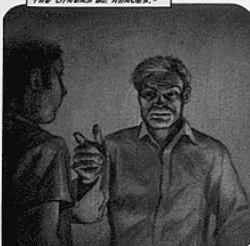
WELL, MIKE,
I CAN SEE
CROWDS LINING
THE ROUTE ALL
THE WAY ALONG
FLEET STREET.

NICK LOVER IS
REALLY GETTING THE
PACE AT THIS STAGE IN
THE GAME. THOUGH OF
COURSE, AS WE KNOW,
THERE'S GOING TO BE A
LOT OF TACTICAL RUN-
NING OVER THIS KIND
OF DISTANCE...

...IT'S MORE
THAN MIDDLE
DISTANCE, AND
IT'S LESS THAN
A MARATHON
BUT THESE MEN
ARE ALL TACTICIANS
AND THEY'LL EACH
BE TRYING TO
LET THE OTHER
MAKE THE
RUNNING IN
THE EARLY
STAGES...

...I'VE BEEN
ASKED BY THE POLICE
TO TELL PEOPLE TO
PLEASE NOT TRY AND
PRIVE DOWN TO SEE THE
RACE, BECAUSE OF COURSE
ALL THESE ROADS HAVE
BEEN CLEARED FOR THE
EVENT, AND IF YOU TRY
AND DRIVE, REALLY
YOU'LL GET NOWHERE.

CAMERON ALWAYS SAID, "LET
THE OTHERS BE HEROES."

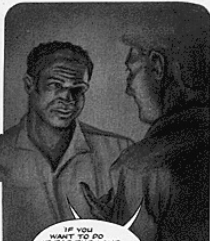


THIS WAS A HARD LESSON TO LEARN,
JOEL HAD FOUND, WHEN THE PISTOL
WAS FIRED, IT WAS DIFFICULT NOT
TO GO FOR BROKE, UNWIND SUDDENLY
LIKE A TIGHT SPRING, ALL GOING IN
THE FIRST TWO HUNDRED YARDS AND
NOTHING LEFT IN RESERVE.



IT'S EASY TO BE A HERO, CAMERON
USED TO SAY, IT'S NOT CLEVER—
NOT CLEVER AT ALL, DON'T WASTE
YOUR TIME SHOWING OFF, HANG ON
TO THE PACK, BUT HOLD BACK A
LITTLE, BETTER TO BE CARRIED
AT THE POST BECAUSE YOU WON
THAN HAVE THEM ALL CALL YOU A
GOOD-HEARTED LOSER.

WIN, WIN, WIN,
AT ALL COSTS, AT ALMOST ALL COSTS.
WIN.
THE MAN WHO DOESN'T WANT TO WIN
IS NO FRIEND OF MINE.



IF YOU
WANT TO DO
IT FOR THE LOVE
OF IT, FOR THE SPORT
OR IF, DO IT WITH
SOMEBODY ELSE.
ONLY PUBLIC SCHOOL
BOYS BELIEVE THAT
GASP ABOUT THE
JOY OF PLAYING
THE GAME.

THERE'S
NO JOY FOR
LOSERS BOY.
WHAT DID I
SAY?

THERE'S
NO JOY
FOR
LOSERS.

IN PATERNOSTER ROW THE CHIFFINLS WAS HUTTED AND THE SHADOWS OF THE BUILDINGS BLOCKED THE SUN. IT WAS ALMOST COLD.

THE PIGEONS STILL PASSED OVER, UNABLE TO SETTLE NOW THEY'D BEEN ROUSED FROM THEIR ROOST. THEY WERE THE ONLY OCCUPANTS OF THE BACK STREETS. THE REST OF THE LIVING WORLD, IT SEEMED, WAS WATCHING THIS RACE.

— AND NICK LOYER IS PALLING BEHIND ALREADY—

THAT WAS QUICK. MIND YOU, LOYER WAS PAST HIS PRIME BY TWO OR THREE YEARS. TIME TO THROW IN THE SPARE AND LET THE YOUNGER MEN TAKE OVER.

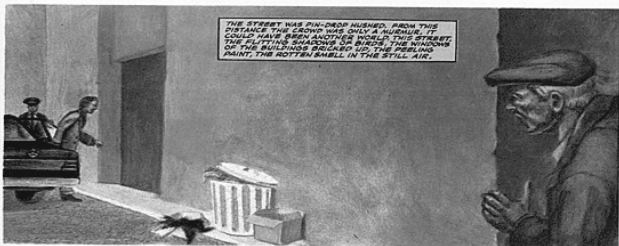
HE'D HAD TO DO IT, THOUGH ANY GOD IT HAD BEEN PAINFUL. CAMERON REMEMBERED ACUTELY HOW HE'D FELT AT TWENTY-THREE WHEN HE REALIZED THAT HIS BEST KLUNING YEARS WERE OVER.

IT WAS LIKE HAVING ONE FOOT BURIED IN THE GRAVE. A SALLUTARY REMINDER OF HOW QUICKLY THE BODY BLOOMS AND BEGINS TO WITHER.

CAMERON DIDN'T LIKE THE LOOKS OF THIS AT ALL. HE'D SEEN THE SOUTH AFRICAN FIVE MINUTES EARLIER, OFF AND RUNNING. SO WHO WAS THIS? A FOOL, OBVIOUSLY. IT SMACK OF A FIX SOMERON; IT STANK TO HIGH HEAVEN.

ITS SLOW PASSAGE MADE IT RELATIVELY EASY FOR CAMERON TO KEEP THE VEHICLE IN VIEW WITHOUT BEING SEEN BY ITS OCCUPANTS, THOUGH THE EFFORT WAS BEGINNING TO LIGHT A FIRE IN HIS LUNGS.

THE MERCEDES WAS THREADING ITS WAY THROUGH THE NARROW STREETS WITH SOME DIFFICULTY, IGNORING ALL THE ONE WAY SIGNS AS IT WENT.



THE STREET WAS PIN-DROP HUSHED. FROM THIS DISTANCE, THE CROWD WAS ONLY A HUMMUR, BUT COULD HAVE BEEN ANOTHER WORLD. THIS STREET, THE FLUTTING SHADOWS OF BIRDS, THE WINDOWS OF THE BUILDINGS BRICKED UP, THE PEELING PAINT, THE ROTTEN SMELL IN THE STILL AIR.



CAMERON CREEPT THROUGH THE OPEN DOOR AS QUIETLY AS HE WAS ABLE. HE HAD, AT IT TURNED OUT, NOTHING TO FEAR. THE TRIO HAD DISAPPEARED DOWN THE DARK HALLWAY OF THE HOUSE LONG SINCE.

THE WALLPAPER IN THE HALLWAY WAS BATH-COLORED, THE PAINT THE SAME. IT WAS LIKE WALKING INTO A BOMBEL—A DEAD MAN'S BOWEL, COLD AND SHITTY.



CAMERON COULD HEAR THEIR VOICES FROM BELOW. NO TIME LIKE THE PRESENT, HE THOUGHT.

THE DARKNESS BEYOND THE DOOR WAS ICY, NOT JUST COLD, NOT FANGS, BUT REFRIGERATED. FOR A MOMENT HE THOUGHT HE'D STEPPED INTO A COLD STORAGE ROOM.



THE OPEN DOOR AT HIS BACK WAS EXTREMELY TREMBLING, BUT HE WAS CURIOUS, SO CURIOUS.

THERE WAS NOTHING TO DO BUT DESCEND.



IN HIS NOSTRILS, THE SCENT OF THE PLACE TEASED. HE HAD A LOBBY SENSE OF SMELL, AND A NOBLES PALATE, AS HIS WIFE WAS FOND OF REMINDING HIM. SHE'D SAY HE COULDN'T DISTINGUISH BETWEEN GARLIC AND A ROSE, AND IT WAS PROBABLY TRUE, BUT THE SMELL IN THIS DEEP MEANT SOMETHING TO HIM, SOMETHING THAT STIRRED THE ACID IN HIS BELY TO LIFE.

THE GOATY SMELL WAS STRONGER NOW, AND MINGLED WITH A SCENT SO SICKLY SWEET IT BELONGED IN A TURKISH BROTHEL.

—HURRY—
—THE RIGHT
SKILLS—CHILD-
REN, CHILDREN

HA HAH HA
I BELIEVE
WE—TOMORROW
—ALL OF US

GOATS. IT SMELT—HA, HE WANTED TO TELL HER THEN AND THERE NOW HE'D REMEMBERED—IT SMELT OF GOATS.

TWO DOORS LED OFF THE CHAMBER, AND FROM BEHIND ONE CAMEROY HEARD THE CONVERSATION CONTINUING.

SUDDENLY THE VOICES SEEMED TO CHANGE DIRECTION AS IF THE SEBANKS WERE MOVING BACK TOWARDS THE DOOR.

HE HAD TO CHOOSE EITHER THE STAIRS OR THE OTHER DOOR. THE STAIRS REPRESENTED UTTER RETREAT. IF HE CLIMBED THEM HE'D BE SAFE, BUT HE'D NEVER KNOW. NEVER KNOW WHY THE COLD, WHY THE BLUE FLAMES, WHY THE SMELL OF GOATS.

THE BITINGLY COLD BRASS HANDLE TURNED WITH SOME TUESLING, AND HE DUCKED OUT OF SIGHT AS THE DOOR OPPOSITE OPENED.

THE DOOR WAS A CHANCE.

THE TWO MOVEMENTS WERE PERFECTLY SYNCOPATED. GOD WAS WITH HIM.

EVEN AS HE CLOSED THE DOOR, HE
KNEW HE'D MADE AN ERROR. GOD
WASN'T WITH HIM AT ALL.

NIBBLES OF COLD PENETRATED HIS HEAD, HIS TEETH,
HIS EYES, HIS FINGERS. HE FELT AS THOUGH HE'D BEEN
THROWN NAKED INTO THE HEART OF AN ICEBERG.



HIS BLOOD SEEMED TO STAND STILL IN HIS
VEINS. THE SPIT OF HIS TONGUE CRYSTALIZED.
THE MUCUS ON THE LINING OF
HIS NOSE PRICKED AS IT TURNED TO ICE.



THE LIGHTER WAS ALREADY CLUED
TO HIS HAND, THE SWEAT ON HIS
FINGERS TURNED TO FROST, WITH
FINGERS SO NUMB THEY COULD
HAVE BEEN CUT OFF WITHOUT HIM
FEELING IT, HE IGNITED HIS LIGHTER
AGAINST THE DARK, AGAINST THE COLD.



THE HOLE IN THE MIDDLE OF
THE ICE - CAVERN
SPARKLED WITH COUNT-
LESS GALLONS OF FROZEN
WATER, AS THOUGH A
RIVER HAD BEEN ARRES-
TED AS IT POURED DOWN
INTO THE DARKNESS.



"Where Alph the sacred river ran,
Through caverns measureless to man,
Down to a sunless sea..."

IF THERE WAS INDEED A SEA DOWN THERE, IT
WAS A FROZEN SEA, IT WAS DEATH FOREVER.



SHIT.

WHETHER THE WORD
ALERTED THE TROD
OUTSIDE, OR WHETHER
GOD DESERTED HIM
TOTALLY AT THAT
MOMENT, HE WOULD
NEVER KNOW.



WHOO

WHAT ARE
YOU DOING HERE,
MR. CAMERON?

CAMERON COULD BARELY
SPEAK. THE ONLY FEEL-
ING LEFT IN HIS HEAD
WAS A PINPOINT OF AGONY
IN THE MIDDLE OF HIS
FOREHEAD.

WHAT
THE HELL IS
GOING
ON?

PRECISELY
THAT, MR. CAMERON.
HELL IS
GOING ON.



AS THEY RAN PAST ST. MARY-LE-STRAND, LOVER DLANCED
BEHIND HIM AND STUMBLER, JOEL, A FULL THREE METERS
BEHIND THE LEADER, KNEW THE MAN WAS GIVING UP.



SO QUICKLY, TOO,
THERE WAS SOME-
THING AMISS.



JOEL BLACKENED HIS PACE, LETTING NYCLOUD
AND VOISANT PASS HIM. NO GREAT MURDER, KIN-
DREMAN WAS QUITE A WAY BEHIND, UNABLE TO
COMPETE WITH THESE FAST BOYS. HE WAS
THE TORTOISE IN THIS RACE FOR SURE.



LOVER'S
BREATH
HAD SUD-
DENLY
DESBERTED
HIM, AND
HIS LEGS
FELT LIKE
LEAD.

BUT THAT
WASN'T THE
WORST OF IT.



HE COLLAPSED INTO
THEIR DEAD ARMS
EXHAUSTED, HIS
YOUTH RECKON
AND HIS STRENGTH
SPENT.



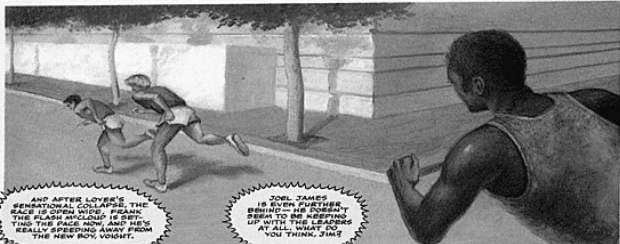
NO ONE ELSE
SAW THESE
HANDS AND
FINGERS, LIKE
LOVELY
CHILDREN,
SEEKING UP
OUT OF THE
GROUND TO
TOUCH HIM.



THE ENQUIRING FINGERS OF THE
DEAD CONTINUED TO FLICK AT HIM,
LONG AFTER THE DOCTORS HAD
REMOVED HIM FROM THE TRACK,
EXAMINED HIM, AND SEDATED HIM.

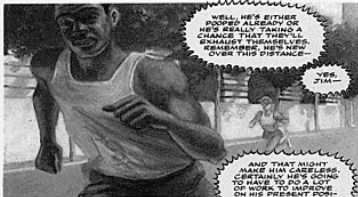


HE KNEW WHY, OF
COURSE. HE'D
LOOKED BEHIND
HIM. THAT'S WHAT
MADE THEM COME.
HE'D LOOKED...



AND AFTER LOVER'S SENSATIONAL COLLAPSE, THE RACE IS OPEN WIDE. FRANK THE FLASH A-CLOUD IS SETTING THE PACE NOW, AND HE'S REALLY SPEEDING AWAY FROM THE NEW BOY, VOIGHT.

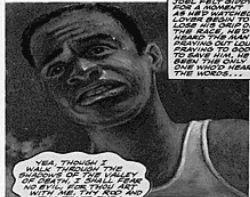
JOEL JAMES IS EVEN FURTHER BEHIND—HE DOESN'T SEEM TO BE KEEPING UP WITH THE LEADERS AT ALL. WHAT DO YOU THINK, JIM?



WELL, HE'S EITHER POoped ALREADY OR HE'S REALLY TAKING A CHANCE THAT THEY'LL EXHAUST THEMSELVES. REMEMBER, HE'S NEW OVER THIS DISTANCE.

YES, JIM—

AND THAT MIGHT MAKE HIM CARELESS. CERTAINLY HE'S GOING TO HAVE TO DO A LOT OF WORK TO IMPROVE ON HIS PRESENT POSITION IN THIRD PLACE.



JOEL FELT SIDDY. FOR A MOMENT AS HE WATCHED LOVER BEGIN TO LOSE HIS GRIP ON THE RACE, HE'D HEARD THE MAN PRAYING OUT LOUD, PRAYING TO GOD TO SAVE HIM. HE'D BEEN THE ONLY ONE WHO'D HEARD THE WORDS...

YEA, THOUGH I WALK THROUGH THE SHADOWS OF THE VALLEY OF DEATH, I SHALL FEAR NO EVIL, FOR THOU ART WITH ME, THY ROD AND THY STAFF, THEY—



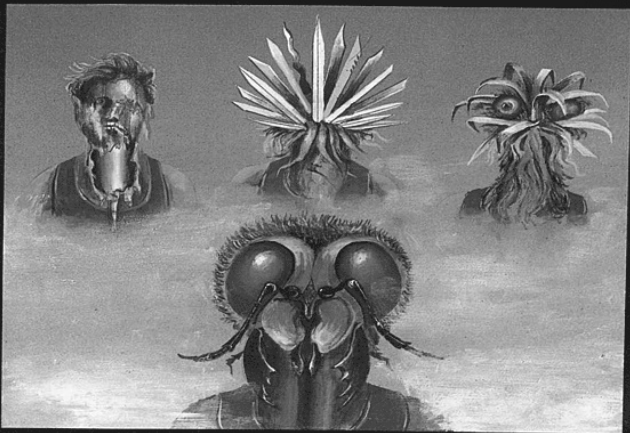
THE SUN WAS HOTTER NOW, AND JOEL WAS BEGINNING TO FEEL THE FAMILIAR VOICES OF HIS TENSE LIMBS. RUNNING ON TARMAC WAS HARD ON THE FEET, HARD ON THE JOINTS, NOT THAT THAT WOULD MAKE A MAN TAKE TO PRAYING. HE TRIED TO PUT LOVER'S DEREGISTRATION OUT OF HIS MIND AND CONCENTRATE ON THE RHYTHM IN HAND.

THERE WAS STILL A LOT OF RUNNING TO DO! THE RACE WAS NOT EVEN HALF OVER, PLENTY OF TIME TO CATCH UP WITH THE HEROES. PLENTY OF TIME.



AS HE RAN, HIS BRAIN IDLY TURNED OVER THE PRAYERS HIS MOTHER HAD TAUGHT HIM IN CASE HE SHOULD NEED ONE, BUT THE YEARS HAD BROOD THEM...

...THEY WERE ALL BUT GONE.





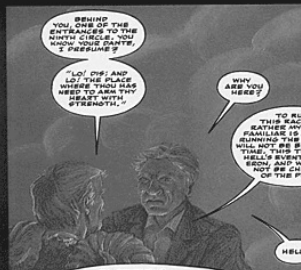
FAMILIES BOTH, THEY'RE MINE OF COURSE.



WHAT?

I SERVE HELL, MR. CAMERON. AND IN ITS TURN HELL SERVES ME.

HELL?



BEHIND YOU, ONE OF THE ENTRANCES TO THE NINTH CIRCLE. YOU KNOW YOUR GANTE, I PRESUME?

"LO! OH; AND LO! THE PLACE WHERE THOU HAS NEED TO ARM THY HEART WITH STRENGTH."

WHY ARE YOU HERE?

TO RUN THIS RACE. OR RATHER MY THIRD FAMILIAR IS ALREADY RUNNING THE RACE. HE WILL NOT BE BEATEN THIS TIME. THIS TIME IT IS HELL'S EVENT, MR. CAMERON, AND WE SHALL NOT BE CHEATED OF THE PRIZE.

HELL?



YOU BELIEVE, DON'T YOU STILL PLAY BROKE? YOU SAY, LIKE ANY GOD-FEARING SOUL, AFRAID OF CHOKING ON YOUR DINNER.

HOW DO YOU KNOW I PRAY?

YOUR WIFE TOLD ME.

OH, YOUR WIFE WAS VERY INFORMATIVE ABOUT YOU, MR. CAMERON. SHE REALLY OPENED UP TO ME. VERY ACCOMMODATING. SHE GAVE ME SO MUCH... INFORMATION, YOU'RE A GOOD SOCIALIST, AREN'T YOU, LIKE YOUR FATHER...

POLITICS NOW—



OH, POLITICS IS THE HUB OF THE ISSUE, MR. CAMERON. WITHOUT POLITICS WE'RE LOST IN THE WILDERNESS, AREN'T WE? EVEN HELL NEEDS ORDER. NINE GREAT CIRCLES! A PECKING ORDER OF PUNISHMENTS. LOOK DOWN; SEE FOR YOURSELF...

CAMERON COULD FEEL THE HOLD AT HIS BACK. HE DIDN'T NEED TO LOOK.



WE STAND FOR ORDER, YOU KNOW, NOT CHAOS. THAT'S JUST HEAVENLY PROPAGANDA, AND YOU KNOW WHAT WE'LL WIN.

IT'S A CHARITY RACE.

CHARITY IS THE LEAST OF IT. WE'RE NOT RUNNING THIS RACE TO SAVE THE WORLD FROM CANCER. WE'RE RUNNING IT FOR GOVERNMENT.

ONCE EVERY CENTURY, THIS RACE IS RUN FROM ST. PAUL'S TO THE PALACE OF WESTMINSTER. OFTEN IT HAS BEEN RUN AT THE DEAD OF NIGHT, UNDER A PALE MOON. TODAY IT IS RUN IN FULL SUNSHINE, WATCHED BY THOUSANDS.

BUT WHATEVER THE CIRCUMSTANCES IT IS ALWAYS THE SAME RACE. YOUR ATHLETES AGAINST ONE OF OURS. IF YOU WIN, ANOTHER HUNDRED YEARS OF DEMOCRACY. IF WE WIN... AS WE WILL... THE END OF THE WORLD AS YOU KNOW IT.

AT HIS BACK CAMERON FELT A VIBRATION.



WELL, WELL,
IT SEEMS WE
ARE ABOUT TO
BE VISITED BY
HIGHER POWERS!
HOW FLAT-
TERING —

IT DIDN'T MATTER HOW CURIOUS CAMERON WAS NOW. THEY HAD HIM; HE MAY AS WELL SEE ALL THERE WAS TO SEE.

CAMERON COULD HEAR ITS BREATHING, SEE THE HOUND OF ITS FEATURES OPEN AND CLOSE IN THE MURK.



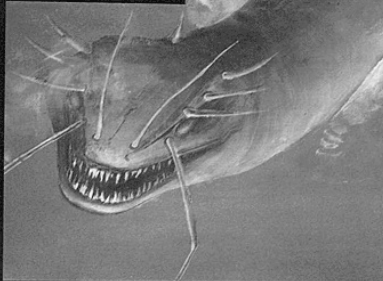
HE KNEW HE WOULD HAVE NO OTHER CHANCE.

CAMERON'S SOLES SLID ON THE FLOOR OUT OF THE ICE-CAVERN AND INTO THE CANDLE-LIT CHAMBER BEYOND.



ITS EYES MET CAMERON'S THROUGH THE OPEN DOOR. THEY SEEMED TO TOUCH HIM LIKE A KISS, ENTERING HIS THOUGHTS THROUGH HIS EYES.

BEHIND HIM, THE ROOM WAS FILLING WITH SMOKE AND SMOKE, AND CAMERON LIKE LOT'S WIFE FLEEING FROM THE DESTRUCTION OF SODOM, GLANCED BACK JUST ONCE TO SEE THE FORBIDDEN EIGHT BEHIND HIM.



HE WAS NOT TURNED TO SALT.



THE CROWDS AT TRAFALGAR SQUARE WERE A SEETHING MASS OF ENTHUSIASM. CHEERS, TEARS AND FLAGS. IT WAS AS THOUGH THIS LITTLE RACE HAD BECOME SOMETHING SPECIAL FOR THESE PEOPLE; A RITUAL THE SIGNIFICANCE OF WHICH THEY COULD NOT KNOW.

SOMEWHERE IN THEM THEY UNDERSTOOD THIS DAY WAS LADEN WITH SULPHUR! THEY SENSED THEIR LIVES STOOD ON TIPPET TO REACH HEAVEN, ESPECIALLY THE CHILDREN.

THEY RAN ALONG THE ROUTE, SHOUTING INCOHERENT BLESSINGS. THEIR RACES SOBBED UP WITH THEIR FEARS. SOME CALLED HIS NAME...

AS THEY TURNED INTO WHITEHALL, FRANK MCLOUD GLANCED CONFIDENTIALLY OVER HIS SHOULDER AND HELL TOOK HIM.

IT WAS SUDDEN!
IT WAS SIMPLE.

"...JOEL! JOEL!"

OR DID HE IMAGINE THAT? HAD HE IMAGINED TOO THE HEAVEN FROM LOVER'S LIPS, AND THE SMILE IN THE RADIANT PAGES OF THE BABIES HELD HIGH TO WATCH THE RUNNERS PASS?

CRAMP?
IS IT A
CRAMP?

RUN,
YOU BASTARD,
RUN...

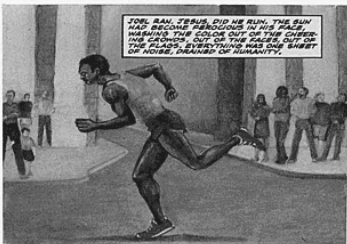
...RUN,
AND DON'T LOOK
BACK. FOR CHRIST'S
SAKE, DON'T LOOK
BACK!

THE WORDS WEREN'T REQUESTS,
BUT IMPERATIVES.

RUN.

RUN
FOR YOUR
LIFE!

NOT FOR
GOLD OR
GLORY,
JUST TO
LIVE.

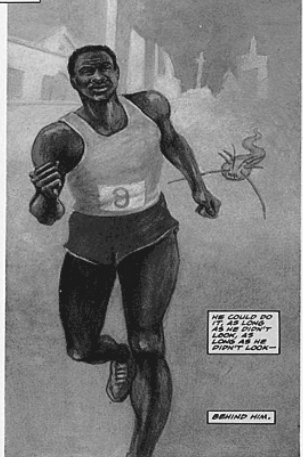


JOEL KNEW THE FEELING THAT WAS COMING OVER HIM, THE SENSE OF DISLOCATION THAT ACCOMPANIED FATIGUE AND OVER-OXYGENATION. HE WAS RUNNING IN A BUBBLE OF HIS OWN CONSCIOUSNESS, THINKING, SWEATING, SUFFERING BY HIMSELF, FOR HIMSELF, IN THE NAME OF HIMSELF.

AND IT WASN'T SO BAD, THIS BEING ALONE. SONGS BEGAN TO FILL HIS HEAD, SNATCHES OF HYMNS, SWEET PHRASES FROM LOVE-SONGS, DIRTY RHYMES. HIS SELF ISLED, AND HIS DREAM-MIND, UNNAMED AND FEARLESS, TOOK OVER.



THAT WAS THE ENEMY, THAT WAS THE THING TO BE SURPASSED. VIOLENT, WITH HIS SHINING CALCRIPX ROCKING IN THE SUN.



TIME HAD BEEN WASTED, VALUABLE TIME. HE SHOULD BE AT THE HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT, AT THE FINANCING LINE, READY TO WELCOME THE RUNNERS HOME. THERE WAS A SCENE TO PLAY, IN WHICH BLUESIE WOULD PRETEND THE KID AND SAILING FACE OF DEMOCRACY, AND TOMORROW? NOT SO KID.



HIS HANDS WERE CLAMMY WITH EXCITEMENT, AND HIS SUIT SMELT OF THE COAT-RAIN COAT HE WAS OBLIGED TO WEAR IN THE ROOM. STILL, NOBODY WOULD NOTICE, AND EVEN IF THEY DID, WHAT ENGLISHMAN WOULD BE SO IMPOLITE TO MENTION THAT HE SMELT GOITY?



HE HATED THE LOWER CHAMBER, THE PERPETUAL ICE THAT DAMN VANNING'S HOLE WITH ITS DISTANT SOUND OF LOSS. BUT ALL THAT WAS OVER NOW. HE'D MADE HIS ORATIONS, SAVED HIS LITTLE AND CARELESS ADOPTION OF THE PUT; NOW IT WAS TIME TO REAP THE REWARDS.



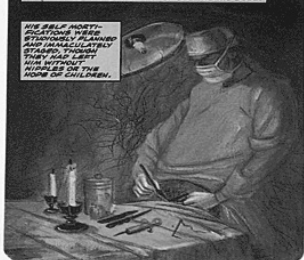
AS THEY PROVE, HE THOUGHT OF HIS MANY SACRIFICES TO AMBITION...

AT FIRST, MINOR STUFF: KITTENS AND COCKERELS. LATER HE WAS TO DISCOVER HOW RIDICULOUS THEY THOUGHT SUCH GESTURES WERE.



BUT AT THE BEGINNING, HE'D BEEN INNOCENT, NOT KNOWING WHAT TO GIVE OR HOW TO GIVE IT.

THEY BEGAN TO MAKE THEIR REQUIREMENTS CLEAR AS THE YEARS WENT BY, AND HE, IN TIME, LEARNED TO PRACTICE THE STIGMATE OF SELLING HIS SOUL.



HIS SELF-MOTIVATIONS WERE STUDIOUSLY PLANNED AND IMMACULATELY STAGED, THOUGH THEY HAD LEFT HIM WITHOUT NURSE OR THE HOPE OF CHILDREN.

IT WAS WORTH THE PAIN THOUGH! THE POWER CAME TO HIM BY DEGREES.



A TRIPLE FIRST AT OXFORD, A WIFE CHOSEN BEYOND THE DREAMS OF PARLIAMENT, A SEAT IN PARLIAMENT, AND SOON, SOON ENOUGH, THE COUNTRY ITSELF.



THE CAUTERISED STUMPS OF HIS THINGS BEGAN TO ACHES. THEY OFTEN DID WHEN HE WAS NERVOUS.



— WELL, WE'RE NOW IN THE CLOSING STAGES OF WHAT REALLY HAS BEEN ONE HELL OF A RACE, MR. JONES.

OH, YES, IT'S REALLY BEEN A REVELATION, HASN'T IT? VOIGHT IS REALLY THE OUTSIDER OF THE FIELD AND HERE HE IS STREAKING AWAY FROM THE COMPETITION WITHOUT MUCH EFFORT.

OF COURSE, JONES MADE THE UNSELFISH GESTURE OF CHECKING WITH FRANK MC CLOUD THAT HE WAS INDEED ALL RIGHT AFTER THAT BAD FALL OF HIS, AND THAT PUT HIM BEHIND.



IT'S LOST THE RACE FOR JONES, REALLY HASN'T IT?

I THINK THAT'S RIGHT, I THINK IT'S LOST THE RACE FOR HIM, THIS IS A CHARITY RACE, OF COURSE.

ABSOLUTELY, AND IN A SITUATION LIKE THIS, IT'S NOT WHETHER YOU WIN OR LOSE—

IT'S HOW YOU PLAY THE GAME.

RIGHT.

RIGHT.



WELL, THEY'VE BOTH IN SIGHT OF THE HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT, NOW AS THEY COME ROUND THE BEND OF WHITEHALL AND THE CROWDS ARE CHEERING THEIR BOY ON, BUT I REALLY THINK IT'S A LOST CAUSE—

MIND YOU, HE BROUGHT SOMETHING SPECIAL OUT OF THE BAG IN SWEDEN.

HE DID, HE DID,

MAYBE HE'LL DO IT AGAIN.



THE MAN WAS NOT AS FAST AS HE HAD SEEN, JOEL KNEW THERE WAS A SLOWING THERE, AN UNEVENNESS HAD CRAWLED INTO HIS STRIDE, A SURE SIGN OF FATIGUE.

HE COULD TAKE HIM, WITH COURAGE, HE COULD TAKE HIM.

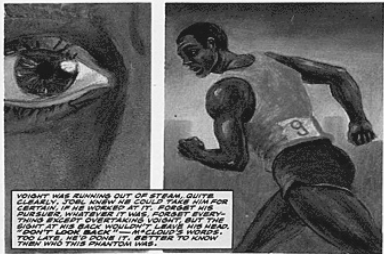


AND KINDERMAN, HE'D FORGOTTEN ABOUT KINDERMAN.

HE WAS WAY BACK, STILL KEEPING HIS STAGY MARATHON RUNNER'S PACE UNCHANGED, BUT THERE WAS SOMETHING ELSE BEHIND JOEL...



STUPID, STUPID!



VOIGHT WAS RUNNING OUT OF STEAM, QUITE CLEARLY, JOEL KNEW HE COULD TAKE HIM FOR CERTAIN, IF HE WORKED AT IT. FORGET HIS PURSUER, WHATEVER IT WAS, FORGET EVERYTHING EXCEPT OVERTAKING VOIGHT, BUT THE BIGHT AT HIS BACK WOULDN'T LEAVE HIS HEAD "DON'T LOOK BACK"—MC CLOUD'S WORDS, TOO LATE, HE'D DONE IT, BETTER TO KNOW THEN WHO THIS PHANTOM WAS.

AT FIRST HE SAW NOTHING, JUST KIN-
HAN JOOGING ALONG. AND THEN THE
GHOST RUNNER APPEARED ONCE MORE,
AND HE KNEW WHAT HAD BROUGHT
MELOD AND LOYBE DOWN.

THIS WAS NO RUNNER, LIVING OR DEAD, IT WAS
HELL ITSELF THAT WAS PRESSING ON HIM.

"DON'T LOOK BACK."

THIS WAS WHY LOYBE HAD
MUTTERED PRAYERS AS
HE RAN. MUCH GOOD IT
HAD DONE HIM! DEATH
HAD COME ANYWAY.

JOEL LOOKED AWAY, NOT CARING TO
SEE HELL SO CLOSE, TRYING TO IGNORE
THE SUDDEN WEAKNESS IN HIS KNEES.

NOW VOIGHT, TOO,
WAS GLANCING
BEHIND HIM. THE
LOOK ON HIS FACE
WAS DARK AND
UNEASY, AND JOEL
KNEW SOMETHING
THAT HE BELONGED
TO HELL, THAT
THE SNAKE
BEHIND HIM
WAS VOIGHT'S
MASTER.

VOIGHT.
VOIGHT.
VOIGHT.
VOIGHT—

BLACK
BASTARD.

LOOK...
BEHIND...
YOU.

NOTHING WOULD TAKE HIM,
HE WAS A SABERIAN WITH
THE MANEUVRES OF A GEN-
TLEMAN IN YOUR NIGHT
NOT ONLY ENTIRELY.

LISTEN...
TO... ME.

WHAT
ARE YOU?

POWER...
I'LL GET YOU
POWER... JUST...
LET... US...
WIN.

I SEE
IT.

IT'S...
COMING...
FOR...
YOU.

THE WORDS WERE MERE
MELODrama: TWO DIMEN-
SIONAL. JOEL WAS NOT
AFRAID OF THE DARKNESS;
HE WAS PAINTED IN IT.
WASN'T THAT WHAT MADE
HIM LESS THAN HUMAN,
AS FAR AS SO MANY PEOP-
LE WERE CONCERNED?

OF MORE, MORE THAN HUMAN;
BLOODIER, SWEATIER, FLESH-
IER, MORE ARM, MORE LEG,
MORE HEAD, MORE STRENGTH,
MORE APPETITE, WHAT COULD
HELL DO TO BAT HIM? HE'D
TASTE POUL ON THE PALATE.
PRESS HIM! HE WAS TOO
HOT-BLOODED, TOO FAST,
TOO LIVING.

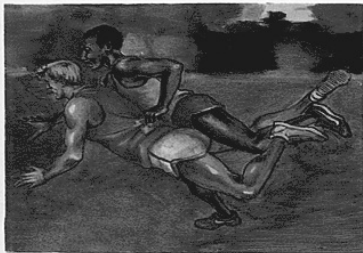
TOO
LATE.

HELL BEHIND HIM, HELL BESIDE HIM—
WHAT DID HE CARE? HE COULD RUN.

BASTARD,
BASTARD,
BASTARD—



JOEL FELT SUDDEN DESPAIR, WELL BEHIND, HELL IN FRONT.





BUT JOEL HAD SNATCHED VOIGHT WITH HIS ONE GOOD ARM, AND NOTHING WAS GOING TO MAKE HIM LET GO.



THE FAMILIAR PLAYING VOIGHT WAS EXHAUSTED. IT HAD NEVER BEEN SO TIRED, UNPREPARED FOR THE STRESS OF THE RACE ITS MASTER HAD DEMANDED IT RUN.

SHOW YOURSELF!



ITS TEMPER WAS SHORT, ITS CONTROL PERILOUSLY CLOSE TO SNAPPING. JOEL COULD SMELL ITS BREATH ON HIS FACE, AND IT WAS THE SMELL OF A GOAT.

NOBODY STEPPED FORWARD. IT WAS PURELY A SPECTATOR SPORT, WRESTLING WITH THE DEVIL. NOTHING TO DO WITH THEM.



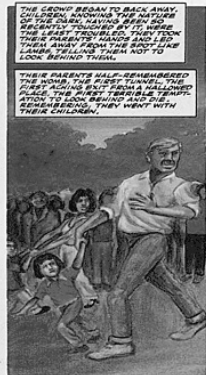
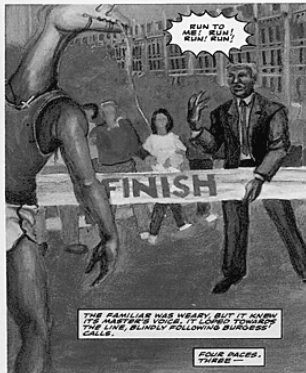
ALL AROUND THE CROWD SHRANK BACK, PEOPLE SHAKEN: PEOPLE RAN. THIS TRANSFORMATION WAS NOT JUST FOR HIS BENEFIT! IT WAS COMMON KNOWLEDGE.



THEY WERE SEEING IT ALL. THE TRUTH. THE FILTHY, GAPING TRUTH.



BURGESS DIDN'T CARE HOW HE APPEARED TO THE WORLD. THE RACE WAS EVERYTHING. A VICTORY WAS A VICTORY, HOWEVER IT WAS WON, AND JONES HAD CHEATED AFTER ALL.



IT WAS STALE IN THE CORRIDORS
OF POWER: NO LIFE, NO HELP.

BURGESS DIDN'T QUITE KNOW WHAT TO
DO. CLEARLY HE WOULD BE BLAMED
FOR HIS FAILURE TO PLAN AGAINST
ALL EVENTUALITIES, BUT HE WAS
CONFIDENT HE COULD ARGUE HIS WAY
OUT OF THAT.

HE WOULD GIVE THEM WHATEVER THEY
DESIRED AS COMPENSATION FOR HIS
LACK OF FORESIGHT. IN EAR, A FOOT—
HE HAD NOTHING TO LOSE BUT FLESH
AND BLOOD.

BUT HE HAD TO PLAN HIS DEFENSE
CAREFULLY, BECAUSE THEY HATED
BAD LOGIC. IT WAS MORE THAN
HIS LIFE WAS WORTH TO COME
BEFORE THEM WITH HALF-POUNDED
EXCUSES.



THERE WAS A CHILL BEHIND HIM; HE
KNEW WHAT IT WAS. HE'LL HAD FOL-
LOWED HIM ALONG THESE SILENT
CORRIDORS, EVEN INTO THE VERY
WOMB OF DEMOCRACY.

HE WOULD SURVIVE, THOUGH, AS LONG
AS HE DIDN'T TURN ROUND! AS LONG
AS HE KEPT HIS EYES ON THE FLOOR,
OR ON HIS THUMBLESS HANDS, NO
HARM WOULD COME TO HIM. THAT WAS
ONE OF THE FIRST LESSONS ONE
LEARNED, DEALING WITH THE GULPS.



I'M
SORRY.

THE VOICE THAT
CAME BACK TO
HIM WAS MILDER
THAN HE EXPECTED.



IT
WASN'T
YOUR
FAULT.

NO. IT
WAS AN ERROR
AND I AM CONTENTE,
I OVERLOOKED
KINDERMAN.

THAT WAS A
MISTAKE. WE ALL MAKE
THEM. STILL, IN ANOTHER
HUNDRED YEARS, WE'LL TRY
AGAIN. DEMOCRACY IS A NEW
CULT: IT'S NOT LOST ITS SUPER-
FICIAL GLAMOUR YET, WE'LL
GIVE IT ANOTHER CENTURY
AND HAVE THE BEST
OF THEM THEN.

YES.



BUT
YOU—

I
KNOW.

NO
POWER
FOR YOU,
GREGORY.

NO.



IT'S NOT
THE END OF
THE WORLD,
GREGORY. LOOK AT ME.

NOT
AT THE
MOMENT.
IF YOU DON'T
MIND.



BURGESS KEPT WALKING, STEADY
STEP UPON STEADY STEP. KEEP
IT CALM, KEEP IT RATIONAL.



LOOK AT ME.

LATER, SHE.



I'M ONLY ASKING YOU TO LOOK AT ME.
A LITTLE RESPECT WOULD BE APPRECIATED.

I WILL—I WILL—REALLY, LATER.



THE CORRIDOR DIVIDED HERE. BURGESS TOOK THE LEFT-HAND FORK. HE THOUGHT THE SYMBOLISM MIGHT FLATTER.



IT WAS A CUL-DE-SAC.



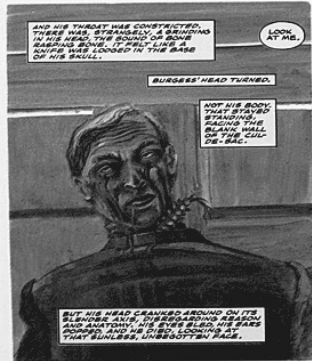
LOOK AT ME, TURN AND LOOK AT ME.

WHAT WAS HE TO DO NOW? BACK OUT OF THE CORRIDOR AND FIND ANOTHER WAY WAS BEST. PERSONALLY, HE'D JUST HAVE TO WALK AROUND AND AROUND IN CIRCLES UNTIL HE'D AROUND HIS POINT SURPRISINGLY WELL FOR HIS BUREAU TO LEAVE HIM BE.

AS HE STOOD, JUGGLING THE ALTERNATIVES, HE FELT A SLIGHT ACHE IN HIS NECK.



LOOK AT ME.



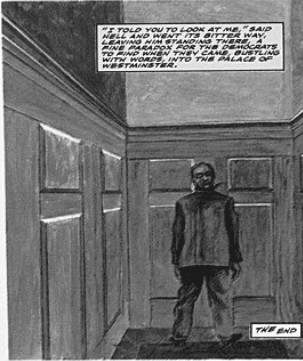
AND HIS THROAT WAS CONSTRICTED. THERE WAS, STRANGELY, A BRINDING IN HIS HEAD, THE SOUND OF BONE RASping BONE. IT FELT LIKE A KNIFE WAS LODGED IN THE BASE OF HIS SKULL.

LOOK AT ME.

BURGESS' HEAD TURNED.

NOT HIS BODY THAT STAYED STANDING, FACING THE BLANK WALL OF THE CUL-DE-SAC.

BUT HIS HEAD CRANKED AROUND ON ITS SLENDER AXIS, DISREGARDING REASON AND LAUGHTY. HIS EYES BLEED, HIS EARS BOPPED, AND HE DIED, LOOKING AT THAT SUNLESS, UNBEGOTTEN FACE.



"I TOLD YOU TO LOOK AT ME," SAID HELL AND WENT ITS BITTER WAY, LEAVING HIM STANDING THERE, A RIME PARADOX FOR THE DEMOCRATS TO FIND WHEN THEY CAME, BUSTLING WITH WORDS, INTO THE PALACE OF WESTMINSTER.

THE END





JERRY GOLDSHORN WAITED ON THE STRIPS OF THE LEOPOLD ROAD SWIMMING POOLS FOR OVER THIRTY-FIVE MINUTES BEFORE GARVEY TURNED UP. HIS FEET WERE STEADILY LOSING FEELING AS THE COLD CREEPT UP THROUGH THE SOLES OF HIS SHOES. THE TIME WOULD COME, HE ASSURED HIMSELF, WHEN HE'D BE THE ONE TO KEEP PEOPLE WAITING.

INDEED, SUCH A PRIVILEGE MIGHT NOT BE SO FAR AWAY. IF HE COULD PERSUADE SARA GARVEY TO INVEST IN THE PLEASURE ZONE, IT WOULD REQUIRE AN APPETITE FOR RISK, AND SUBSTANTIAL ASSETS. BUT HIS CONTACTS HAD ASSURED HIM THAT GARVEY, WHATEVER HIS REPUTATION, POSSESSED BOTH IN ABUNDANCE.

THE SOURCE OF THE MAN'S MONEY WAS NOT AN ISSUE IN THE PROCEEDINGS, OR SO JERRY HAD PERSUADED HIMSELF. WITH AN INVESTOR FOND OF THE FACILITIES HE HAD PLANNED WOULD SCARCELY FAIL TO MAKE MONEY.

JERRY'S BRIEF AT THE DIRECTORATE OF COMMUNITY SERVICES—THE SAME MAN WHO'D HAPPILY FILCHED THE KEYS TO THE PROPERTY FOR TWO BOTTLES OF GIN—HAD TOLD HIM THAT THE BUILDING COULD BE PURCHASED FOR A SONG IF THE OFFER WAS MADE SWIFTLY. IT WAS ALL A QUESTION OF GOOD THINGS.

A SKILL, APPARENTLY, THAT GARVEY LACKED. BY THE TIME HE ARRIVED, THE BUSINESS HAD SPREAD NORTH TO JERRY'S KIDNERS, AND HIS TONGUE HAD WORN THIN. HE MADE NO SHOW OF IT, HOWEVER.

IT'S GOOD TO SEE YOU, MISTER GARVEY.

I'VE ONLY GOT TEN MINUTES. YOU'VE SURVEYED THE PLACE?

OF COURSE.

THIS WAS A LIE. JERRY HAD BEEN OVER THE BUILDING THE PREVIOUS AUGUST, COURTESY OF A CONTACT IN THE ARCHITECTS' DEPARTMENT, BUT IT HAD BEEN FIVE MONTHS SINCE HE'D ACTUALLY STEPPED INTO THE BUILDING. HE HOPED ACCELERATING DECAY HAD NOT TAKEN AN UNSHAKABLE HOLD SINCE THEN.



JERRY, EASIER TO BE OUT OF THE COLD, OPENED THE FRONT DOOR AND GOING THE WAY INSIDE.

THERE'S NO ELECTRICITY ON. WE HAVE TO GO BY FLASHLIGHT.



I'M SORRY ABOUT THE DELAY.

IT HAPPENS.

I THINK STRONG-ARM TACTICS MAY BE CALLED FOR.

JERRY FELT OUT THE OTHER MAN'S RESPONSE TO A BREAK-IN.

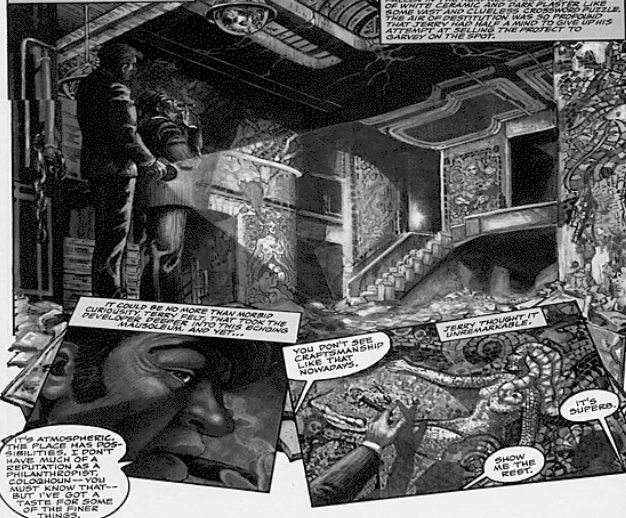
SUITS ME.



OPEN SESAME.

ONCE, NO DOUBT, THE LEOPOLD ROAD ROOMS HAD BEEN A SHOWCASE OF BECO DESIGN--OF SHINING TILES AND GLEAMING MOSAICS WORKED INTO FLOOR AND WALL, BUT NOT IN JERRY'S ADULT LIFE, CERTAINLY.

THE TILES UNDERFOOT HAD LONG SINCE LIFTED WITH THE DAMP, ALONG THE WALLS THEY HAD FALLEN IN THE HUNDREDS, LEAVING PATTERNS OF WHITE CERAMIC AND DARK PLASTER LIKE SOME VAST AND CLUELESS CROSSWORD PUZZLE. THE AIR OF DESTITUTION WAS SO PROFOUND THAT JERRY HAD HAD A MIND TO GIVE UP HIS ATTEMPT AT SELLING THE PROTECT TO GARVEY ON THE SPOT.



IT COULD BE NO MORE THAN MORBID CURIOSITY, TERRY FELT, THAT TOOK THE DEVELOPING DEERK INTO THIS ECHOING MAUSOLEUM, AND YET...

YOU PONT SEE CRAFTSMANSHIP LIKE THAT NOWADAYS.

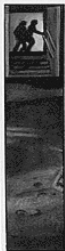
TERRY THOUGHT IT UNREMARKABLE.

IT'S SUPERB.

SHOW ME THE REST.

IT'S ATMOSPHERIC. THE PLACE HAS POSSIBILITIES. I DON'T HAVE MUCH OF A REPUTATION AS A PHILANTHROPIST, COLOGHOUN--YOU MUST KNOW THAT--BUT I'VE GOT A TASTE FOR SOME OF THE FINER THINGS.

THE COMPLEX HAD ONCE BOASTED A HOST OF FACILITIES--SAUNA ROOMS, TURKISH BATHS, THERMAL BATHS--IN ADDITION TO THE TWO POOLS. THESE VARIOUS AREAS WERE CONNECTED BY A WADEN OF PASSAGEWAYS THAT, UNLIKE THE MAIN CORRIDOR, HAD NO SKYLIGHTS: THE FLASHLIGHT HAD TO SUFFICE HERE.



DARK OR NO, GARVEY WANTED TO SEE ALL THE PUBLIC AREAS THE TEN MINUTES HE HAD WARNED WERE HIS LIMIT STRETCHED INTO TWENTY AND THIRTY. THE EXPLORATION CONSTANTLY BROUGHT TO A HALT AS HE DISCOVERED SOME NEW FELICITY TO COMMENT UPON. TERRY LISTENED WITH BURNED COMPREHENSION: HE FOUND THE MAN'S ENTHUSIASM FOR THE DECK CONFOUNDING.



A TRICK OF THE CORRIDORS, THE ECHOES IN THIS PLACE ARE MISLEADING. SOMETIMES YOU HEAR YOUR OWN FOOTSTEPS COMING BACK TO MEET YOU.

I DID HEAR SOMETHING.

HE LISTENED AGAIN.



THE CORRIDORS WERE PIN-DROP HUSHED.

IT WAS NOT EVEN POSSIBLE TO HEAR THE TRAFFIC ON LEOPOLD ROAD.



LEAP ON.



JERRY DID JUST THAT, THOUGH THE ROUTE TO THE POOLS WAS BY NO MEANS CLEAR TO HIM. THEY TOOK SEVERAL WRONG TURNINGS, WINDING THEIR WAY THROUGH A MAZE OF IDENTICAL CORRIDORS, BEFORE THEY REACHED THEIR INTENDED DESTINATION.



IT'S WARM.

JERRY ALIENATED HIS AGREEMENT, IN HIS EAGERNESS TO REACH THE POOLS. HE HAD NOT NOTICED THE STEADILY ESCALATING TEMPERATURE. BUT NOW THAT HE STOOD STILL, HE COULD FEEL A FILM OF SWEAT ON HIS BODY.

THE AIR WAS HUMID, BUT IT SMELLED NOT OF DAMP AND MILDEW, AS ELSEWHERE IN THE BUILDING. THIS WAS A SICKLY, ALMOST OPLENT SCENT. HE HOPED GARVEY, COCOONED IN THE SMOKE OF HIS CIGAR, COULD NOT SHARE THE SMELL; IT WAS FAR FROM PLEASANT.

PERHAPS THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGINEERS WARNED THE HEATING SYSTEM THROUGH ONCE IN A WHILE, TO KEEP IT IN WORKING ORDER. GARVEY THOUGHT, IN WHICH CASE WERE THEY IN THE BOWELS OF THE BUILDING SOMEWHERE? PERHAPS GARVEY HAD HEARD VOICES? HE MENTALLY CONSTRUCTED A LINE OF EXPLANATION SHOULD THEIR PATHS CROSS.



THE POOLS.



ALWAYS HAD A FEAR OF WATER. DON'T KNOW WHERE IT COMES FROM.

MY WIFE SAYS IT'S THE WOMB.

THE WOMB?

I DIDN'T LIKE SWIMMING AROUND IN THERE, SHE SAYS.

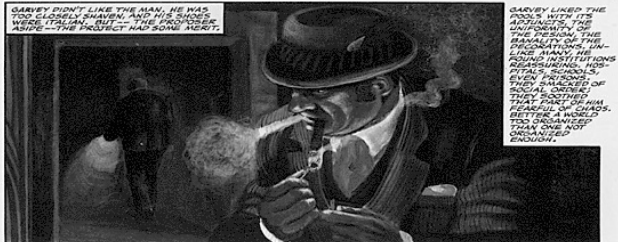


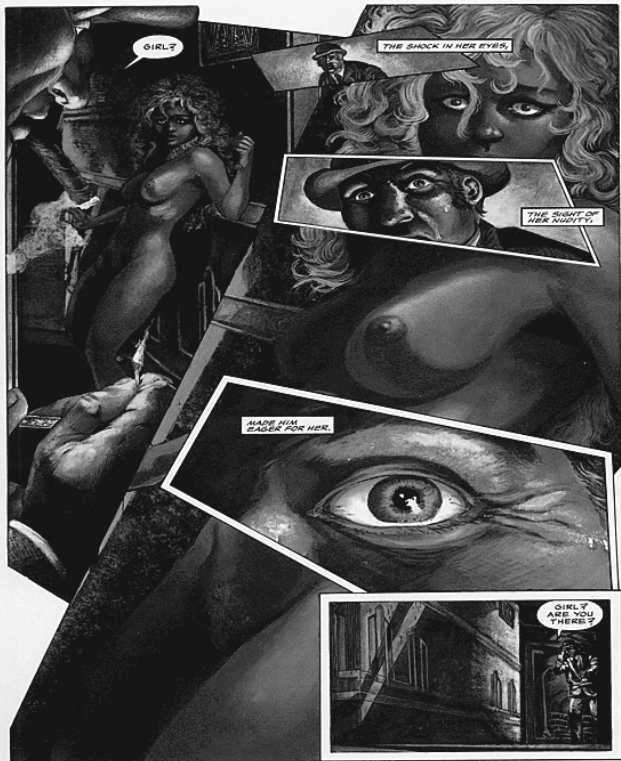
--ESPECIALLY THE HUMAN VARIETY. I'VE GOT ENEMIES, MR. COLOMBO. BUT THEN YOU'VE DONE YOUR RESEARCH ON ME. HAVEN'T YOU? YOU KNOW I'M NO LILY-WHITE.

GARVEY'S CONCERN ABOUT THE NOISES HE THOUGHT HE'D HEARD NOW MADE UNPALATABLE SENSE. IT WASN'T RATS HE WAS AFRAID OF, BUT GRUE-VIOUS BODILY HARM.



GARVEY DIDN'T LIKE THE MAN. HE WAS TOO CLOSELY SHAVEN, AND HIS SHOES WERE ITALIAN, BUT-- THE PROCEED ASIDE--THE PROTECT HAD SOME MERIT.





SHE COULD NOT BE FAR, HE REASONED. HE HAD GONE ONLY A FEW STEPS WHEN HE HEARD SOMEBODY BEHIND HIM. IT WAS ONLY THE ITALIAN SHOES.

THERE'S NO NEED TO BLIND ME.

I'M SORRY. THERE'S NO WAY IN.



THERE'S SOMEBODY HERE, COLOUGHAN. A GIRL.

YOU KNOW SOMETHING ABOUT IT, MAYBE?

A GIRL? NO.

SHE WAS STARK NAKED, STANDING THREE OR FOUR YARDS FROM ME.

JERRY LOOKED AT GARVEY, MYSTIFIED, WAS THE MAN SUFFERING FROM SEXUAL DELUSIONS?

I TELL YOU I SAW A GIRL! IF YOU HADN'T ARRIVED, I'D HAVE HAD MY HANDS ON HER. GET SOME LIGHT DOWN THERE!



DAMN.

ALL RIGHT-- LET'S GET THE HELL OUT OF HERE.



I'M INTERESTED. THE PROJECT HAS POTENTIAL. DO YOU HAVE A GROUND PLAN OF THE PLACE?

NO, BUT I CAN GET MY HANDS ON ONE.

DO THAT, AND SEND ME YOUR PROPOSALS IN MORE DETAIL. THEN WE'LL TALK AGAIN.



IT TOOK A CONSIDERABLE BRIBE TO GET THE PLANS OF THE POOLS OUT OF HIS CONTACT AT THE ARCHITECTS' DEPARTMENT, BUT JERRY EVENTUALLY SECURED THEM. ON PAPER, THE COMPLEX LOOKED LIKE A LABYRINTH, AND LIKE THE BEST LABYRINTHS, THERE WAS NO ORDER APPARENT IN THE LAYOUT OF SHOWER ROOMS AND BATHROOMS AND CHANGING ROOMS.

IT WAS CAROLE WHO PROVED THAT THIS WAS TO BE WRONG.

WHAT IS THIS?

THEY'D HAD FOUR OR FIVE HOURS TOGETHER AT HIS FLAT—HOURS WITHOUT THE BICKERING, THE BAD FEELING THAT HAD SOURCED THEIR TIME TOGETHER OF LATE.

IT'S THE GROUND PLAN OF THE SWIMMING POOLS ON LEOPOLD ROAD. DO YOU WANT ANOTHER BRANDY?

NO THANKS.

I THINK I'VE GOT GARVEY IN ON THE DEAL.

YOU'RE GOING TO DO BUSINESS WITH HIM, ARE YOU?

DON'T MAKE ME SOUND LIKE A WHITE SLAVER. THE MAN'S GOT MONEY. DIRTY MONEY.

WHAT'S A LITTLE PIST BETWEEN FRIENDS?

SO I SHOULD JUST FORGET ALL THE HARD LABOR I'VE PUT IN AND ADD THIS FAILURE TO ALL THE OTHERS? CHRIST!

SHE LOOKED AT HIM FROSTILY, AND HE WISHED HE COULD HAVE SLAYED BACK THE PERJURIOUS TEN SECONDS AND BRASSING THE COMMENT.

I THINK GARVEY AND HIS LIKE ARE BAD NEWS. I DON'T CARE HOW MUCH MONEY HE'S GOT. HE'S A VILLAIN, JERRY.

HE WATCHED HER FROM OVER THE RIM OF HIS WHISKY TUMBLER; SAW THE PARTING DOWN THE MIDDLE OF HER HEAD, AND THE FINE BLOND HAIR THAT DIVIDED FROM THERE.

WHATEVER THOUGHTS BUZZED BENEATH HER TENDER SCALP THEY WERE A MYSTERY TO HIM. AND HIS TO HER, PRESUMABLY.

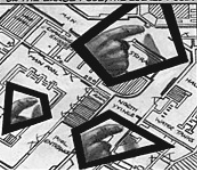
IT'S A SPIRAL.

WHAT IS?

THE POOLS. IT'S DESIGNED LIKE A SPIRAL. LOOK.

SHE WAS RIGHT, THOUGH THE IMPERATIVE OF THE ARCHITECT'S BRIEF HAD MURDERED THE CLARITY OF THE IMAGE. THERE WAS INDEED A ROUGH SPIRAL BUT INTO THE MAZE OF CORRIDORS AND ROOMS, HER CIRCLING FINGERS DREW TIGHTER AND YET TIGHTER LOOPS AS IT DESCRIBED THE SHAPE. AT LAST IT CAME TO REST ON THE LARGE POOL, THE LOVED POOL.

CAROLE DECIDED SHE WOULD NOT STAY THE NIGHT. IT WAS NOT SHE TRIED TO EXPLAIN AT THE DOOR, THAT THINGS BETWEEN THEM WERE OVER, ONLY THAT SHE VALUED THEIR INTIMACY TOO MUCH TO MISUSE IT AS RAVENAGE. HE HALL GRASPED THE POINT; SHE TOO PICTURED THEM AS WOUNDED ANIMALS.



HE STARED AT THE PLAN IN SILENCE. WITHOUT HER POINTING IT OUT, HE KNEW HE COULD HAVE LOOKED AT THE DESIGN FOR A WEEK AND NEVER SEEN THE UNDERLYING STRUCTURE.



AT LEAST THEY HAD SOME METAPHORICAL LIFE IN COMMON.

SCARCELY A QUARTER-HOUR HAD PASSED SINCE HE'D VISITED THE POOLS WITHOUT EZZA GARVEY THINKING OF THE GIRL HE'D GLIMPSED IN THE COORIDOR. HER FACE HAD COME BACK TO HIM DURING DINNER WITH HIS WIFE AND SEX WITH HIS MISTRESS. SO UNTRAMMELED, THAT FACE, SO BRIGHT WITH POSSIBILITIES.

GARVEY THOUGHT OF HIMSELF AS A WOMAN'S MAN. UNLIKE MOST OF HIS FELLOW POTENTATES, WHOSE CON-SORTS WERE A CONVENIENCE POST PAID TO BE A PART WHEN NOT REQUIRED FOR SOME SPECIFIC FUNCTION. GARVEY ENJOYED THE COMPANY OF THE OPPOSITE SEX, THEIR VOICES, THEIR PER-FUME, THEIR LAUGHTER.



EITHER IT WAS SUBSTANTIALLY COLDER OUTSIDE THAN IT HAD BEEN THE DAY BEFORE YESTERDAY, OR ELSE THE INTERIOR WAS HOT. HE WELCOMED THE HEAT REMINDING HIM AS IT DID OF THE SHEEN ON THE DREAM GIRL'S SKIN, OF THE HEAT-LANGUED LOOK IN HER PINK EYES.



HIS SENSE OF DIRECTION HAD ALWAYS BEEN GOOD; IT TOOK HIM ONLY A SHORT TIME TO FIND HIS WAY TO THE SPOT OUTSIDE THE LARGE POOL WHERE HE HAD ENCOUNTERED THE GIRL. THERE HE STOOD STILL AND LISTENED.



HIS GREED FOR THEIR PROXIMITY KNEW FEW BOUNDS; THEY WERE PRECIOUS CREATURES WHOSE COMPANY HE WAS WILLING TO SPEND SMALL FORTUNES TO SECURE. HIS JACKET WAS THEREFORE WEIGHED DOWN WITH MONEY AND EXPENSIVE TRINKETS WHEN HE RETURNED, THAT MORNING, TO LEOPOLD ROAD.

IF I NEED YOU, I'LL SHOUT.

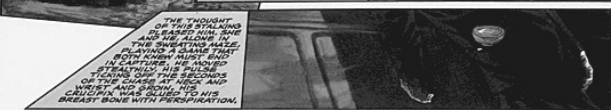
SILENCE, AND YET HE KNEW HE WAS NOT ALONE. WHEN FIVE SENSES FAILED HIM, A SIXTH -- BELONGING, PERHAPS, MORE TO THE BEAST IN HIM THAN THE SOPHISTICATE HIS EXPENSIVE SUIT SPOKE OF -- SENSED PRESENCE. THIS FACULTY HAD SAVED HIS MORE THAN ONCE. NOW, HE HOPED, IT WOULD GUIDE HIM INTO THE ARMS OF BEAUTY.



TRUSTING TO INSTINCT HE EXTINGUISHED THE LIGHT AND HEADED OFF DOWN THE CORRIDOR FROM WHICH THE GIRL HAD FIRST EMERGED. FEELING HIS WAY ALONG THE WALLS, HIS GUARDY'S PRESENCE TANTALIZED HIM. HE SUSPECTED SHE WAS A NERE WALL AWAY, KEEPING FACE WITH HIM ALONG SOME SECRET PASS, BARE HE HAD NO ACCESS TO.



THE THOUGHT OF THIS STALKING PLEASED HIM. SHE AND HE ALONE IN THE SWEATING HALL, PLAYING A GAME THAT BOTH KNEW MUST END IN CAPTURE. HE MOVED STEALTHILY, HIS PULSE TICKING OVER THE SECONDS OF THE CHASE AT NECK AND WRIST AND GOWN. HIS CRUCIFIX WAS GLUED TO HIS BREAST BONE WITH PERSPIRATION.



AGAIN, HE STOOD STILL, THIS TIME HIS STRAINING EARS WERE REWARDED WITH A SOUND. ACROSS THE ROOM FROM HIM, A GLEAM OF NAKED SKIN SET OFF THE TILES.



WAS IT HIS IMAGINATION, OR DID HE EVEN GLIMPSE THE GIRL, HER BODY CARVED FROM THE GLOOM, PALER THAN THE SURROUNDING DARKNESS, AND SMOOTHER?

NOW THE LIGHT WAS BRIGHTENING, AND BY IT HE FINALLY SET EYES ON THE GIRL; OR RATHER, ON A GIRL, FOR IT WAS NOT THE SAME HE HAD SEEN TWO DAYS BEFORE. PUZZLEMENT NOW LENT FIDUCIARITY TO THE CHASE; NOT ONE BUT TWO GIRLS, OCCUPYING THIS SECRET PLACE.

HE PRESSED ON, ROUND ONE CORNER...

...AND ANOTHER...

WHY?

...AND ANOTHER.

DAILY AWARE THAT THESE EVILATIONS WERE BECOMING TIGHTER AS HE TURNED UPON HIMSELF AND UPON HIMSELF AGAIN GARVEY WENT WHERE SHE LIES, FANTASY NOW WITH THE BREATH-QUENCHING AIA AND THE INSISTENCE OF THE CHASE...

...UNTIL AT LAST THE OBJECT OF HIS PURSUIT STOOD BEFORE HIM. AT THE SIGHT OF HER SMOOTH BACK AND EXQUISITE BUTTOKS, HIS CLAUSTROPHOBIA EVAPORATED.

GIRL...
YOU LEP ME QUITE A CHASE.

I'M TALKING TO YOU.

SHE SEEMED NOT TO HEAR HIM, OR, MORE LIKELY, WAS EXTENDING THE GAME TO ITS LIMITS OUT OF WAYWARDNESS.

AS HE CAME WITHIN HALF A DOZEN FEET OF HER, SHE TURNED, HIS GAZE RESTED ON HER UNFAMILIAR FACE A FEW SECONDS ONLY, BEFORE SLIDING GIDDILY DOWN TO MEET THE CHILD SHE HELD IN HER ARMS.

WHAT IN CHRIST'S NAME--?

WELL ITSELF HAD FORSPRING MORE ENBRACEABLE.

THE GIRL STARED AT GARVEY'S ALARM, AND A WAVE OF LAUGHTER BROKE OVER HER FACE. THE CHILD IN HER ARMS UNCLIPPED A PUCKERED LIP AND CLAWED IT TO ITS COMFORTER'S BOSON SO AS TO GET BETTER PURCHASE.



THE GESTURE LASHED GARVEY'S DISGUST INTO RAGE.

OUT BEYOND THE CHAMBER, SOMETHING GAVE VOICE. GARVEY HAD NO DOUBT OF ITS CUE: IT WAS ANSWERING THE DEATH-CRY OF THE CHILD, AND THE RISING WAIL OF ITS MOTHER-- BUT THE SOUND WAS MORE DISTRESSING THAN EITHER.



GARVEY'S IMAGINATION WAS AN IMPOVERISHED FACULTY. BEYOND HIS DREAMS OF WEALTH AND WOMEN LAY A WASTELAND, YET NOW, AT THE SOUND OF THAT VOICE, THE WASTELAND BLOODED, AND GAVE FORTH HORRORS HE'D BELIEVED HIMSELF INCAPABLE OF CONCEIVING. NOT PORTRAITS OF MONSTERS, WHICH, AT THE BEST, COULD BE NO MORE THAN ASSEMBLIES OF EXPERIENCED PHENOMENA.



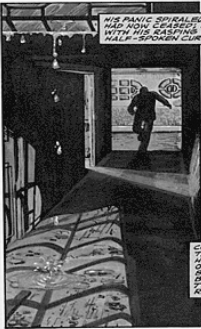
WHAT HIS MIND CREATED WAS MORE FEELING THAN SIGHT: BELONGED TO HIS MARRON, NOT TO HIS MIND. ALL CERTAINLY TREMBLED-- MASCULINITY, POWER, THE TWIN IMPERATIVES OF PRECIP AND REASON-- ALL TURNED THEIR COLLARS UP AND DENIED KNOWLEDGE OF HIM. HE SHOOK, AFRAID AS ONLY DREAMS MADE HIM AFRAID, WHILE THE CRY WENT ON AND ON.



HIS SENSE OF DIRECTION HAD DESERTED HIM. AT THE FIRST INTERSECTION, AND THEN AT THE SECOND, HE MADE AN ERROR. A FEW YARDS ON, HE REALIZED HIS MISTAKE AND TRIED TO DOUBLE BACK, BUT MERELY EXACERBATED THE CONFUSION.



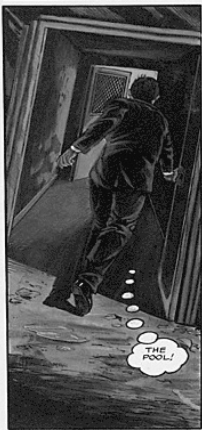
INDEED, SO PREOCCUPIED DID HE BECOME WITH THOUGHTS OF THE AGONIES HE'D MAKE COLOGHOUN SUFFER, HE FAILED TO REALIZE THAT HE HAD TRACED HIS WAY ROUND IN A CIRCLE.



HIS PANIC SPIRALED; THE WAILING HAD NOW CEASED. HE WAS ALONE WITH HIS RASPING BREATH AND HALF-SPOKEN CURSES.

COLOGHOUN WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR THIS TORMENT, AND GARVEY SWORE HE WOULD HAVE ITS PURPOSE BEATEN OUT OF THE MAN EVEN IF HE HAD TO BREAK EVERY BONE IN COLOGHOUN'S BODY PERSONALLY. HE CLUNG TO THOUGHTS OF THAT BEATING AS HE RAN ON; IT WAS HIS ONLY COMFORT.

GARVEY HALTED AND TOOK STOCK OF HIS SITUATION. IF HE WENT BACK THE WAY HE'D COME, THE ROUTE WOULD ONLY CONFOUND HIM AGAIN; IF HE WENT AHEAD, THROUGH THE CHAMBER AND TOWARD THE LIGHT, HE MIGHT CUT THE GORDIAN KNOT AND BE DELIVERED BACK TO HIS STARTING POINT. THE SWIFT WIT OF THE SOLUTION PLEASED HIM.



THE POOL!

THIS WAS THE SOURCE OF THE LIGHT. THE WATER IN THE POOL GAVE OFF A GLOWING RESCUE THAT TONED EVERYTHING--THE TILES, THE DIVING BOARD, THE CHANGING ROOMS (HIMSELF, NO DOUBT)--WITH THE SAME FULVUS WASH.

HE LOOKED BACK TOWARD THE WATER, CURIOSITY GETTING THE BETTER OF HIM. THE STEAM SWIRLED; AN BODY TOYED WITH THE SCUM, AND THERE--HIS EYE CAUGHT SIGHT OF A DARK, ANONYMOUS SHAPE SLIDING BENEATH THE SKIN OF THE WATER.

HE THOUGHT OF THE CREATURE HE'D KILLED OF ITS FORMLESS BODY AND THE PANGLING LOOKS OF ITS LIMBS. WAS THIS ANOTHER OF THAT SPECIES? THE LIQUID BRIGHTNESS LAIRIED AGAINST THE POOL'SIDE AT HIS FEET; CONTINENTS OF SCUM BROKE INTO MANDIBLES. ON THE SWIMMER, THERE WAS NO SIGN.

THEN CAME THE ARRIVAL OF THREE GALS. THE PEK-ADVENTING WATERS OF THE POOL WERE STIRRED INTO A FRENZY AS ITS OCCUPANTS ROSE TO MEET THE WOMEN. GARVEY COULD SEE THREE OR FOUR REST-LESS FORMS--TEASING--BUT NOT BREAKING--THE SURFACE.

HE WAS CAUGHT BETWEEN HIS INSTINCT TO TAKE FLIGHT (THE ROPE THOUGH PRETTIFIED, WAS STILL A ROPE) AND THE DESIRE TO LINGER AND SEE WHAT THE POOL CONTAINED.

ALL THE DESIRES THAT HAD BROUGHT HIM HERE HAD TAKEN TO GIVE HIM NO LONGER WANTED TO CUP THE BREASTS OF THESE CREATURES, OR FABLE AT THE INTERSECTION OF THEIR GLEAMING THIGHS.

THESE WOMEN WERE NOT WHAT THEY SEEMED. THEIR QUIETNESS WASN'T DO-CILITY, BUT DRUG-TRANCE; THEIR NAKEDNESS WASN'T SENSUALITY, BUT A HORRID INDIVIDUALITY THAT OFFENDED HIM.

HE STOOD, MEETING THE SLUT'S EYES, AS SHE KISSED HIS CHEEK AND THE DISBONDED ROPE WAS WRAPPED AROUND HIS NECK.

NNNNH...

EVEN THEIR YOUTH, AND ALL IT BROUGHT--THE SOFTNESS OF THEIR SKINS, THE GLOSS OF THEIR HAIR--EVEN THAT WAS SOMEHOW CORRUPT.

JERRY CALLED GARVEY'S OFFICE AT HALF-HOUR INTERVALS THROUGH THE DAY. AT FIRST HE WAS TOLD THAT GARVEY WAS OUT ON THE OFFICE AND WOULD BE AVAILABLE LATER THAT AFTERNOON. AS THE DAY WORE ON, HOWEVER, THE MESSAGE CHANGED. MR. GARVEY IS FEELING UNWELL. THE SECRETARY TOLD HIM HE HAS GONE HOME TO REST. JERRY LEFT WITH HER THE MESSAGE THAT HE HAD SECURED THE GUNNING PLAN TO THE POOL AND WOULD BE DELIGHTED TO MEET AND DISCUSS THEIR PLANS AT MR. GARVEY'S CONVENIENCE.



JERRY TOOK CAROLE TO A FRENCH MOVIE, WHICH SEEMED AS FAR AS JERRY COULD GRASP, COMPLETELY LACKING IN PLOT. IT WAS SIMPLY A SERIES OF DIALOGUES BETWEEN CHARACTERS DISCUSSING THEIR TRAUMAS AND THEIR ASPIRATIONS, THE FORMER BEING IN DIRECT RECOGNITION TO THE FAILURE OF THE LATTER. IT LEFT HIM FEELING TORPID.



YOU DIDN'T LIKE IT...

AND NO SHOOT OUT.

SHE SMILED TO HERSELF.

"SA" NOTHING.

I WAS JUST SAILING, THAT'S ALL. CAN'T I SAIL?

NOT MUCH. ALL THAT BROW-BEATING.

WHAT'S SO FUNNY?

DON'T SAY NOTHING.

YESUS, ALL THIS CONVERSATION NEEDS IS SUBTILES, YOU'RE SO INFURIATING--

THAT'S SOMETHING WE HAVE IN COMMON, ANYHOW, YOU DON'T GIVE A FLICK, JERRY, NOT ABOUT ME, NOT ABOUT ANYBODY.



SHE STARED AT HIM, ALMOST DRYING HIM TO A CRISP. WHEN HE FAILED TO, SHE SEEMED CURIOUSLY SATISFIED.

GOODNIGHT.



HE WATCHED HER TAKE FIVE, SIX, SEVEN STEPS FROM HIM, THE DEEPEST PART OF HIM WANTING TO CALL AFTER HER, BUT A DOZEN INEFFECTUAL VANCES -- PRIDE, PATHOS, INCONVENIENCE -- BLOCKED HIS DOING SO.

WHAT EVENTUALLY UPROOTED HIM, AND PUT HER NAME ON HIS LIPS, WAS THE THOUGHT OF AN EMPTY BED TONIGHT, OF THE SHEETS WARM ONLY WHERE HE LAY, AND CHILLY AS WELL TO LEFT AND RIGHT OF HIM.

CAROLE...

I SURRENDER. THE FILM WAS A MASTERPIECE, HOW'S THAT?

DON'T, PLEASE DON'T, I'M NOT...

VERY GOOD AT APOLOGIES, HE WANTED TO SAY, BUT HE WAS SO MAD AT THEM, HE COULDN'T EVEN MANAGE THAT MUCH.

NEVER MIND.

SHE WASN'T ANGRY, HE SAID, ONLY MISERABLE.

COME BACK TO THE FLAT.

I DON'T WANT TO.

I WANT YOU TO. I DON'T LIKE TALKING IN THE STREET.



FOUL
PERFUME.
SOMEBODY'S
BEEN UP
HERE.

THIS IS
PERSONAL, JERRY.
I'LL CALL THE POLICE.
YOU FIND OUT WHAT'S
MISSING.

HE DID AS HE WAS TOLD,
WHITE FACED, THE BLOW
OF THIS INVASION
NUMBERED HIM.

AS HE WALKED LISTLESSLY
THROUGH THE FLAT TO SUR-
VEY THE PANDEMONIUM,
HE FOUND HIMSELF IMAG-
INING THE INTRUDERS
ABOUT THEIR BUSINESS,
LAUGHING AS THEY WORKED
THROUGH HIS CLOTHES
AND KEEPSAKES.

THE POLICE
ARE ON THEIR
WAY, JERRY, THEY
SAID NOT TO TOUCH
ANYTHING.

TOO
LATE.

WHAT'S
MISSING?

NOTHING.

HE RETURNED TO THE LIVING
ROOM AND PROCEEDED TO ROOT
THROUGH THE WRECKAGE, BUT
HE KNEW DAMN WELL HE WASN'T
GOING TO FIND IT. HE WAS ANGRY.

GARVEY.

WHAT
ABOUT
HIM?

HE CAME FOR THE
GROUND PLAN
OF THE POOLS, OR
SENT SOMEONE.

WHY? YOU
WERE GOING TO
GIVE IT TO HIM
ANYWAY.

YOU WERE
THE ONE WHO
WARNED ME TO
STAY CLEAR--

I NEVER
EXPECTED SOME-
THING LIKE THIS.

ALL THE VALUABLES--
THE STEREO AND VIDEO
EQUIPMENT, HIS CREDIT
CARDS, HIS FEW ITEMS
OF JEWELRY--WERE
THERE, ONLY THEN
DID HE REMEMBER
THE GROUND PLAN.

THAT
MAKES TWO
OF US.

THE POLICE CAME AND WENT, OFFERING PAINT APOLOGIES FOR THE FACT THAT THEY THOUGHT AN ARREST UNLIKELY.

SO, DO YOU WANT TO STAY HERE OR GO OVER TO MY PLACE?

STAY.

THEY MADE A DEREGULATORY ATTEMPT TO RESTORE THE FORMER STATUS QUO, THEN THEY TURNED THE SLASHED MATTRESS OVER, LOCATED THE UNMUTILATED CUSHIONS, AND WENT TO BED.

HE WANTED TO MAKE LOVE, BUT THAT REASSURANCE, LIKE SO MUCH OF HIS LIFE OF LATE, WAS DOOMED TO FAILURE. THERE WAS NO HARKING GOOD BETWEEN THE SWEETS WHAT HAD BEEN SO RAPIDLY SOURCED OUT OF THEM.

HIS ANGER MADE HIM ROUGH, AND HIS ROUGHNESS IN TURN ANGERED HER.

SHE FROWNED BENEATH HIM, HER KISSES UNWILLING AND LIGHT. HER RELUCTANCE ONLY SPURRED HIM ON TO GREYER CAJOLERY.

STOP. I DON'T WANT THIS.

HE PUSHED BEFORE SHE COULD FURTHER HER OBJECTIONS.

HE CLOSED HIS EYES, SHE TOLD HIM AGAIN TO STOP, THIS TIME WITH REAL FURY. BUT HE JUST THIRST HARDER -- THE WAY SHE'D ASK HIM TO SOMETIMES, WHEN THE HEAT WAS REALLY ON -- BES HIM TO, EVEN...

HE SHUT OUT HER VOICE. HE WAS HALF AS HEAVY AGAIN AS SHE.

STOP!

I SAID DON'T, JERRY!

...BUT NOW SHE ONLY SWORE AT HIM, AND THREATENED. AND EVERY WORD SHE SAID MADE HIM MORE INTENT NOT TO BE CHEATED OF THIS, THOUGH HE FELT NOTHING AT HIS ORCH BUT FULLNESS AND DISCOMFORT, AND THE URGE TO BE FINISHED.

IT PASSED THROUGH HIS HEAD AS HE LABORED THAT SHE WOULD HATE HIM FOR THIS, AND ON THAT AT LEAST, THEY WOULD BE OF ONE ACCORD, BUT THE THOUGHT WAS SOON LOST TO SENSATION.

HE FELT NEITHER WRETCHED NOR PROUD, THE FRONT DOOR OPENED AND WAS SLAMMED, JERRY WAITED, LISTENING TO CAROL'S FEET ON THE STAIRS.

THEN TEARS CAME, THOUGH THESE TOO HE FELT UTTERLY DETACHED FROM. FINALLY, THE BOUL DISMANTLED, HE WENT THROUGH INTO THE KITCHEN, FOUND A GLASS, AND DRANK HIMSELF SENSELESS.

THE POISON PASSED, HE ROLLED OFF HER.

BASTARD.

SARVEY'S STUDY WAS AN IMPRESSIVE ROOM; HE'D HAD IT FASHIONED AFTER THAT OF A TAX LAWYER HE'D KNOWN, WHEN HE FOUND SLEEP DIFFICULT. AS HE DID NOW, HE WOULD RETIRE TO THE STUDY, SIT ON HIS LEATHER-BACKED CHAIR BEHIND A VAST DESK, AND DREAM OF LEIGHTHACK, NOT TONIGHT (HOWEVER!) TONIGHT HIS THOUGHTS WERE OTHERWISE PREOCCUPIED, ALWAYS, HOWEVER MUCH HE MIGHT TRY TO TURN TO ANOTHER ROUTE, THEY WENT BACK TO LEOPOLD ROAD.

HE REMEMBERED LITTLE OF WHAT HAD HAPPENED AT THE POOLS, THAT IN ITSELF WAS DISTRESSING; HE HAD ALWAYS PRIZED HIMSELF UPON THE ACUTENESS OF HIS MEMORY. INDEED, HIS RECALL OF FACES SEEN AND FAVORS DONE HAD IN NO SMALL MEASURE HELPED HIM TO HIS PRESENT POWER.

BUT OF THE EVENTS AT LEOPOLD ROAD, BARELY THIRTY-SEVEN HOURS OLD, HE HAD ONLY THE VAGUEST RECOLLECTION: OF THE WOMEN CLOSING UPON HIM, AND THE ROPE TIGHTENING AROUND HIS NECK; OF THEIR LEADING HIM ALONG THE LIP OF THE POOL TO SOME CHAMBER, THE VILENESS OF WHICH HAD PRACTICALLY SNATCHED HIS SENSES AWAY.

WHAT HAD FOLLOWED HIS ARRIVAL THERE HUNG IN HIS MEMORY LIKE THOSE FORMS IN THE FILTH OF THE POOL; OBBSCURE, BUT HORRIBLY DISTRESSING. THERE HAD BEEN HUMILIATION AND HORRORS, HADN'T THERE? BEYOND THAT, HE REMEMBERED NOTHING.

HE WAS NOT A MAN TO KOWTOW TO SUCH ANXIQUITIES WITHOUT ARGUMENT, HOWEVER. IF THERE WERE ANY, HE WOULD BE UNCOVERED HERE, THEN HE WOULD DO SO, AND TAKE THE CONSEQUENCE OF REVELATION. HIS FIRST OFFENSIVE HAD BEEN CHANDAMAN AND FEVER TO TEAR UP COLOUGHOUN'S PLACE, IF, AS HE SUSPECTED, THIS WHOLE ENTERPRISE WAS SOME ELABORATE TRAP DEvised BY HIS ENEMIES, THEN COLOUGHOUN WAS INVOLVED IN ITS SETTING.

CHANDAMAN HAD RETURNED WITH THE GROUND PLAN OF THE POOLS, AND SARVEY HAD TRACED HIS ROUTE THROUGH THE COMPLEX TIME AND AGAIN, HOPING THAT HIS MEMORY MIGHT BE JOSSSED, HE HAD BEEN DISAPPOINTED.

THE GARDEN BEHIND THE HOUSE WAS FAST AND PAINSTAKINGLY TENDED. HE COULD SEE LITTLE OF THE IMMAGULATE BORDERES AT THE MOMENT, HOWEVER; THE STARKLY BARELY DESCRIBED THE WORLD OUTSIDE. ALL HE COULD SEE WAS HIS OWN REFLECTION IN THE POLISHED PANE.

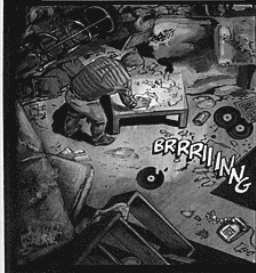
AS HE FOCUSED ON IT, HIS OUTLINE SEEMED TO WAVER, AND HE FELT A LOOSENING IN HIS LOWER BELLY, AS IF SOMETHING HAD COME UNKNOTTED THERE. HE PUT HIS HAND TO HIS ABDOMEN, IT TWITCHED, IT TREMBLED, AND FOR AN INSTANT HE WAS BACK IN THE POOLS, AND NAKED, AND SOMETHING LUMPHEN MOVED IN FRONT OF HIS EYES.

HE ALMOST YELLED, BUT STOPPED HIMSELF BY TURNING AWAY FROM THE WINDOW AND STARING AT THE ROOMS! AT THE CARPETS AND THE BOOKS AND THE FURNITURE! AT SOBER, SOLID REALITY. EVEN THEN THE IMAGE REFUSED TO LEAVE HIS HEAD ENTIRELY. THE COILS OF HIS INWARDS WERE STILL JITTERY.

IT WAS SEVERAL MINUTES BEFORE HE COULD BRING HIMSELF TO LOOK BACK AT THE REFLECTION IN THE WINDOW. WHEN AT LAST HE DID, ALL THE OF THE FACILLATION HAD DISAPPEARED. HE WOULD COUNTENANCE NO MORE NIGHTS LIKE THIS, SLEEPLESS AND HAUNTED. WITH THE FIRST LIGHT OF DAWN CAME THE CONVICTION THAT TODAY WAS THE DAY TO BREAK HIS, COLOUGHOUN.

JERRY TRIED TO CALL CAROLE AT HER OFFICE THAT MORNING. SHE WAS REPEATINGLY UNAVAILABLE. EVENTUALLY HE SIMPLY GAVE UP TRYING AND TURNED HIS ATTENTION TO THE HERCULEAN TASK OF RE-BOOKING SOME ORDER TO THE FLAT.

AFTER A FUTILE HOUR, IN WHICH HE SEEMED NOT TO HAVE MADE MORE THAN A DENT, HE GAVE UP. THE CHAOS ACCURATELY REFLECTED HIS OPINION OF HIMSELF. BEST PERHAPS THAT IT BE LEFT TO LIE.



HE RANG CAROLE AGAIN, BUOYED UP BY THIS TURN OF EVENTS. THIS TIME HE DID NOT TAKE THE REPEATED EXCUSES OF HER COLLEAGUES BUT INSISTED ON SPEAKING TO HER. FINALLY, SHE PICKED UP THE PHONE.



I DON'T WANT TO TALK TO YOU, JERRY. JUST GO TO HELL.

JUST HEAR ME OUT--

WHY ARE YOU EVEN TRYING? JESUS CHRIST, WHAT'S THE USE?

I WANT YOU TO UNDERSTAND HOW SICK I FEEL. LET ME MAKE IT RIGHT. PLEASE LET ME MAKE IT RIGHT.



DON'T PUT THE PHONE DOWN. PLEASE DON'T. I KNOW IT WAS UNFORGIVABLE. JESUS, I KNOW...



MR. COLOGHOUN? MR. GERALD COLOGHOUN?

THAT'S RIGHT.

MY NAME'S FRYER. I'M CALLING ON BEHALF OF MR. GARVEY. HE WAS EXPECTING SOME PROPOSALS FROM YOU.

WAS THIS TO GLOAT, OR THREATEN FURTHER MISCHIEF?



MR. GARVEY WOULD LIKE ANOTHER MEETING AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.

YES?

AT THE POOLS, THERE'RE A FEW ARCHITECTURAL DETAILS HE'D LIKE TO SHOW HIS COLLEAGUES. WOULD YOU BE AVAILABLE LATER ON TODAY?

YES. OF COURSE.

FOUR-THIRTY?

THE CONVERSATION MORE OR LESS ENDED THERE, LEAVING JERRY MYSTIFIED. THERE HAD BEEN NO TRACE OF SANITY IN FRYER'S MANNER! NO HINT, HOWEVER SUBTLE, OF BAD BLOOD BETWEEN THE TWO PARTIES. PERHAPS THE EVENTS OF THE PREVIOUS NIGHT HAD BEEN THE WORK OF ANONYMOUS VANDALS-- THE THEFT OF THE GROUND PLAN A WHIM OF THEIRS. HIS DEPRESSIVE SPIRITS ROSE. ALL WAS NOT LOST.



JUST THINK ABOUT IT, WILL YOU? GIVE ME A CHANCE TO PUT THINGS RIGHT. WILL YOU DO THAT?

I DON'T SEE THE USE.

MAY I CALL YOU TOMORROW?



HE HEARD HER SIGH.

MAY I?

YES... YES.

THE LINE WENT DEAD.

HE SET OUT FOR HIS MEETING AT LEOPOLD ROAD WITH A FULL THREE-QUARTERS OF AN HOUR TO SPARE, BUT HALFWAY TO HIS DESTINATION THE RAIN CAME ON GREAT SLEDS OF IT WHICH DEFIED THE BEST EFFORTS OF HIS WINDSHIELD. THE TRAFFIC SLOWED; HE CRAWLED FOR HALF A MILE, WITH ONLY THE REAR LIGHTS OF THE VEHICLE AHEAD VISIBLE THROUGH THE DELUGE. BY THE TIME HE BOGGED HIS WAY OUT OF THE FOULED-UP TRAFFIC TO FIND ANOTHER ROUTE, HE WAS ALREADY LATE.

ABOUT TIME.

THE RAIN...

YOU'LL CATCH YOUR DEATH.

FRYER! PLEASED TO MEET YOU.

THEY SHOOK HANDS, AND AS THEY DID SO TERRY CAUGHT SIGHT OF GARVEY, WHO WAS STARING AT HIM AS THOUGH IN SEARCH OF A SECOND HEAD. THE MAN DIDN'T SAY ANYTHING FOR WHAT SEEMED LIKE HALF A MINUTE, BUT SIMPLY STUDIED THE GROWING DISCOMFORT OF TERRY'S FACE.

I'M NOT A STUPID MAN.

THE STATEMENT, COMING OUT OF NOWHERE, BROOD RESPONSE.

I DON'T EVEN BELIEVE YOU'RE THE MAIN MAN IN ALL OF THIS. I'M PREPARED TO BE CHARITABLE.

WHAT'S THIS ABOUT?

I DIDN'T TELL YOU TO GO.

CHARITABLE, BECAUSE I THINK YOU'RE OUT OF YOUR DEPTH. ISN'T THAT RIGHT?

I HAVEN'T A CLUE WHAT YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT.

TERRY SHRUGGED LIGHTLY, EACH WORD GARVEY UTTERED MERELY PERPLEXED HIM MORE, BUT THE MAN HAD ALREADY TOLD HIM IGNORANCE WOULD NOT BE CONSIDERED A LEGITIMATE EXCUSE. PERHAPS A QUESTION WAS THE WISEST REPLY.

FOR MYSELF, THE DEAL I OFFERED—

FORGET YOUR FUCKING DEAL. I'M NOT INTERESTED IN DEALS.

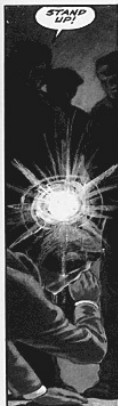
I SEE, THEN I DON'T SEE ANY POINT IN THIS CONVERSATION.

YOU SAW WOMEN HERE?

WHORES, MORE LIKE. WHO ARE YOU WORKING FOR, COLOUGHOUN?

THIS PLACE, I'M TALKING ABOUT THIS PLACE, THE WOMEN YOU PUT IN HERE, FOR MY BENEFIT. WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT, COLOUGHOUN? THAT'S ALL I WANT TO KNOW, WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT?





THERE WAS EVIDENTLY NO SAFE ROUTE PAST HIS TORMENTORS TO THE FRONT DOOR; HIS ONLY HOPE LAY IN LOSING HIMSELF IN THE NETWORKS OF CORRIDORS THAT LAY AHEAD.



IF, AS CAROLE HAD SAID THE PLACE WAS A SIMPLE SPIRAL, THE CORRIDORS DESCRIBING A RELENTLESS LOOP WITH NO WAY OUT OF THE CONFIGURATION, HE WAS LOST. BUT HE HAD COMMITTED HEAD-ON BY THE MOUNTING HEAT; HE MOVED ON, PRAYING TO FIND A FIRE EXIT THAT WOULD GIVE HIM PASSAGE OUT OF THIS TRAP.



GARVEY KNEW ALL TOO WELL NOW WARM IT WAS. SUCH HEAT WASN'T NATURAL, NOT FOR ENGLAND; THIS WAS A TEMPERATE ISLE; THAT WAS WHY HE HAD NEVER SET FOOT OFF IT. THE SWeltering HEAT OF OTHER CONTINENTS BRIDGOT-QUERIES HE WANTED NO SIGHT OF.



PERHAPS THEY WEREN'T FOLLOWING. IT WAS SEVERAL MINUTES NOW SINCE JERRY HAD HEARD THE VOICES BEHIND HIM.



HE CLOSED HIS EYES AND MADE A STUDIED ATTEMPT TO MESSARIZE HIMSELF OUT OF HIS PAIN. WHAT WAS FEELING BUT A TRICK OF THE NERVE-ENDINGS?



BUT NO SOONER HAD HIS LIPS CLOSED THAN HE HEARD MUTED SOUNDS SOMEWHERE NEARBY: FOOTSTEPS! THE LULL OF VOICES, FEMALE VOICES.



EITHER HE HAD BECOME USED TO THE DARKNESS IN HIS FEW MOMENTS OF MEDITATION OR ELSE A LIGHT HAD CREEPT INTO THE PASSAGEWAY; IT WAS SURELY THE LATTER.

THE HEAT SEEMED TO HAVE RISEN CONSIDERABLY IN THE LAST FEW MINUTES! IT GAVE HIM MILD HALLUCINATIONS.



IF GARVEY HAD HEARD HIS YELL, AND SENT HIS LIEUTENANTS IN PURSUIT, THEN SO BE IT...

... HE WAS FAST CARING.



THE SOUND OF MOVEMENT REACHED HIM FROM ACROSS THE CHAMBER. A NAKED GIRL HAD APPEARED IN THE DOORWAY OPPOSITE, OR SO HIS REELING SENSES INFORMED HIM.



THE GIRL HAD BEGUN TO LAUGH AT HIM, A LIGHT EASY LAUGH THAT MADE HIM FEEL FOOLISH. ITS MUSICALITY ENTRANCED HIM: THESE WERE THE WOMEN GARVEY HAD BABBLED ABOUT! THIS THE TRAP HE HAD ACCUSED JERRY OF SETTING.



THE WOMAN HAD NOT ANSWERED HIS INQUIRY, NOR DID SHE MAKE ANY ATTEMPT TO HELP HIM. LOOKING UP AT HER, TERRY FELT HIS FENIGUS GRIP ON CONSCIOUSNESS SLIPPING, THE HEAT, HIS PAIN, AND NOW THIS SUDDEN ERUPTION OF BEAUTY WAS TOO MUCH FOR HIM.



THE DISTANT WOMEN WERE DISPERSED INTO SHARDS. THE ENTIRE CHANGELING FOLDING UNDER A MAGNANIMOUS BOON. UNTIL THE SUBLIME CREATURE IN FRONT OF HIM CLAIMED HIS ATTENTION UTTERLY.

AND NOW, AT HER SILENT INSISTENCE, HIS MIND'S EYE SEEMED TO BE PLUCKED FROM HIS HEAD, AND SUDDENLY HE WAS SPEEDING OVER HER SKIN, HER FLESH A LANDSCAPE, EACH POSE A PIT, EACH HAIR A PYLON.

HE WAS HERE, UTTERLY. SHE DIVINED HIM IN HER EYES, AND PLAYED HIM WITH HER LASHES! SHE ROLLED HIM ACROSS HER ABDOMEN, AND DOWN THE SOFT CHANNEL OF HER SPINE.

SHE TOOK HIM BETWEEN HER BUTTOCKS AND THEN UP INTO HER HEAT, AND OUT AGAIN JUST AS HE THOUGHT HE MUST BURN ALIVE.

THE VELOCITY EXHILARATED HIM. HE WAS AWARE THAT HIS BODY SOMEWHERE BELOW WAS HYPERVENTILATING IN ITS TERROR, BUT HIS IMAGINATION—CARELESS OF BREATH—WENT WILLINGLY WHERE SHE SENT HIM, LOOKING LIKE A BIRD, UNTIL HE WAS THROWN, RAISED AND DIZZY, BACK INTO THE CLIP OF HIS SKULL, BEFORE HE COULD APPLY THE FRAGILE TOOL OF REASON TO THE PHENOMENA HE HAD JUST EXPERIENCED. HIS EYES FLUTTERED CLOSED AND HE PASSED OUT.

THE BODY DOES NOT NEED THE MIND. IT HAS PROCEEDURES ALREADY—LUNGS TO BE FILLED AND EMPTIED, BLOOD TO BE CIRCULATED AND EXCHANGED, KIDNEYS TO BE CLEARED, AND SO ON. NONE OF WHICH REQUIRE THE AUTHORITY OF THOUGHT. ONLY WHEN ONE OR MORE OF THESE PROCEDURES FAILS DOES THE MIND BECOME AWARE OF THE INTRICACY OF THE MECHANISM IT INHABITS.



COLOUGHAN'S PAIN LASTED ONLY A FEW MINUTES, BUT WHEN HE CAME TO HE WAS AWARE OF HIS BODY AS HE HAD BEFORE. ITS FRAGILITY WAS A TRAP, ITS SHARPNESS A TRAP, AND THERE WAS NO FLYING OUT OF IT. HE WAS SUGGLED TO, OR IN, THIS WRETCHENESS.



THEY
MEAN TO
DROWN
ME!



NO! I'M
ALREADY
DROWNING!



HUSH...

THERE WAS MOVEMENT BEHIND THE CASCA-
DING VEIL OF WATER: A SHAPE TOO VAST TO
BE HUMAN, WAS IT AN ANIMAL? THERE WAS
A PUNYENT SMELL IN HERE THAT HAD SOME-
THING OF THE MENAGERIE ABOUT IT.



HE SENSED THAT
HE WAS SENSED!
THAT THE DARK,
RECURRENT CREA-
TURE HAD TURNED
ITS EYES IN HIS
DIRECTION.
BENEATH ITS
GAZE, HE FELT
HIS SKIN CREEP
WITH GOOSEBUMP,
BUT HE COULDN'T
TAKE HIS EYES
OFF IT.



NO, NOT IT! SHE.
HE KNEW INSTAN-
TLY THAT THIS
CREATURE WAS
FEMALE, THOUGH
IT ASSEMBLED NO
SPECIES OR GENUS
HE KNEW OF.

WATCHING HER, JERRY THOUGHT OF
SOMETHING SLOW AND MOLTEN—
GLASS PERHAPS, OR STONE— ITS
FLESH EXTRUDED INTO ELABORATE
FORMS AND RECALLED AGAIN INTO
THE FURNACE TO BE REMADE.

NOW THE BODY ISSUED A SERIES OF SOFT NOISES; SCUTTILINGS AND SINGS. HE WONDERED IF HE WAS BEING ADDRESSED, AND, IF SO, HOW HE WAS EXPECTED TO RESPOND.

DON'T BE AFRAID.

I'M NOT.

WHAT IS SHE?

SHE IS THE MADONNA, THE VIRGIN MOTHER.

MOTHER?

THE WAVES OF PHOSPHORESCENCE HAD CEASED TO BREAK ACROSS HER BODY. NOW THE LIGHT PULSED IN ONE PART OF HER ANATOMY ONLY, AND AT THIS REGION, IN RHYTHM WITH THE PULSE, THE MADONNA'S SUBSTANCE WAS SWELLING AND SPLITTING.

THE MADONNA WAS GIVING BIRTH.

NOT HUMAN...

ARE ALL... ALL THE CHILDREN LIKE THAT?

NO ONE IS LIKE ANOTHER. WE FEED THEM, SOME DIE, OTHERS LIVE, AND GO THEIR OWN WAYS.

AND THE FATHER?

BUT WHEN JERRY LOOKED BACK FOR THE MOTHER AND CHILD, THEY HAD GONE. INDEED, ALL THE WOMEN HAD GONE BUT ONE. SHE SAT ACROSS THE ROOM, HER LEGS SPREAD. HE SAID AT THE PLACE BETWEEN THEM, AND THEN BACK AT HER FACE.

WHAT ARE YOU AFRAID OF?

I'M NOT AFRAID.

AFTER THEY HAD MADE LOVE, HE AND THE SAILING GIRL, WHEN HE TRIED TO RECALL THE SPECIFICS OF THE ACT, HE COULD NOT BE CERTAIN THAT HE HAD PERFORMED AT ALL. ONLY THE VAGUEST MEMORIES REMAINED TO HIM, AND THEY WERE NOT OF HER KISSES, OR OF HOW THEY COUPLED...

WHERE, FOR GOD'S SAKE?

TO THE WATER, TO THE SEA, INTO DREAMS.

SHE NEEDS NO HUSBAND. SHE COULD MAKE CHILDREN FROM A SHOWER OF RAIN IF SHE SO DESIRED.

THEN WHY DON'T YOU COME TO ME?

NEVER... NEVER...

WHSSHT

NOW, ALL TOO LATE, EZRA GARVEY KNEW THAT RETURNING TO THE POOLS (EVEN FOR AN ACT OF INTIMIDATION, WHICH HE HAD TRADITIONALLY ENJOYED) HAD BEEN AN ERROR. IT HAD REOPENED A WOUND IN HIM THAT HE HAD HOPED WAS NEAR TO HEALING; AND IT HAD BROUGHT MEMORIES OF HIS SECOND WIFE, THIRDS, CLOSER TO THE SURFACE (MEMORIES WHICH HE HAD SOUGHT TO CLARIFY UNTIL HE BEGAN TO GRASP THEIR TRUE NATURE).



THEY HAD DRUBBED HIM SOMEHOW, HADN'T THEY? AND WHEN HE WAS WEAK AND HAD LOST ALL SENSE OF PROPRITY, THEY HAD BUCKLED HIM LIKE A CHILD AND MADE HIM THEIR PLAYTHING. THE MEMORIES OF THAT MENDEL PERPLED HIM; BUT THERE WERE OTHERS, TOO DEEP TO BE DISTINGUISHED QUITE, THAT APPALLED, OF WATER FALLING IN A CURTAIN OF A DARKNESS THAT WAS TERRIBLE, AND A LUMINESCENCE THAT WAS MORE TERRIBLE STILL.



THE TIME HAD COME, HE KNEW, TO TRAMPLE THESE DREAMS UNDERFOOT AND BE DONE WITH SUCH BASTARDMENT. HE WAS A MAN WHO FORGOT NEITHER FAVORS DONE NOR FAVORS OWED. A LITTLE BEFORE ELEVEN, HE CALLED SOME OF THOSE FAVORS IN. WHAT-EVER LIVED AT LEBOLD ROAD POOLS WOULD PROSPER THERE NO LONGER. SATISFIED WITH HIS NIGHT'S MANEUVERS, HE WENT UPSTAIRS TO BED.



WHEN HE NEXT WOKE, IT WAS 11:30 A.M. HE HAD SELDOM BEEN ILL IN HIS FORTY-ODD YEARS! SUCHES HAD KEPT ALLIGENTS AT BAY, BUT NOW HE FELT TERRIBLE. HIS BELLY WAS CROVETING AGAIN! INDEED, HIS WHOLE BODY FELT TRAUMATIZED. HE HAD A HEADACHE WHICH WAS NEAR TO BLINDING— HE STUMBLED FROM HIS BEDROOM DOWN TO THE KITCHEN MORE BY AID OF TOUCH THAN SIGHT. THERE HE Poured HIMSELF A GLASS OF MILK.



...SAT DOWN AT THE TABLE AND PUT IT TO HIS LIPS. HE DID NOT DRINK, HOWEVER. HIS GAZE HAD ALIGHTED ON THE HAND THAT HELD HIS GLASS. HE STARED AT IT THROUGH A FOG OF PAIN. IT DIDN'T SEEM TO BE HIS HAND.



HE NEEDED TO BE WITH SOMEBODY; ANYBODY WOULD DO, HE PICKED UP HIS TELEPHONE BOOK AND TRIED TO MAKE SENSE OF THE SCRAMBLINGS ON EACH PAGE, BUT THE NUMBERS WOULD NOT COME CLEAR.



WAS THIS INSANITY? THE DELUSION OF HIS TRANSFORMED HAND, THE UNNATURAL SENSATIONS THAT WERE RUNNING THROUGH HIS BODY.

HE REACHED TO UNBUTTON HIS SHIRT; AND IN DOING SO HIS HAND SLUSHED ANOTHER DELUSION, MORE ABREUDED THAN THE FIRST. FINGERS UNWILLING, HE TORE AT THE SHIRT, TELLING HIMSELF OVER AND OVER THAT NONE OF THIS WAS POSSIBLE.



BUT THE EVIDENCE WAS PLAIN, THERE WERE STILL SIGNS THAT THE FLESH AND BONE BELONGED TO HIM— AN APPENDIX SCAR ON HIS LOWER ABDOMEN, A BIRTH-MARK BENEATH HIS ARM— BUT THE SUBSTANCE OF HIS BODY HAD BEEN TEASED, (WAS BEING TEASED STILL, EVEN AS HE WATCHED) INTO SHAPES THAT SHAMED HIM. HE CLAWED AT THE FORMS THAT DISFIGURED HIS TORSO, AS IF THEY MIGHT DISOLVE BENEATH HIS ASSAULT; BUT THEY MERELY BLED.



UNABLE TO HOLD BACK THE TEARS, HE BEGAN TO PULL AT THE BELT OF HIS TROUSERS. PLEASE, GOD, HE RASPELED, PLEASE, GOD, LET ME BE WHOLE STILL. HE PEEPED AT HIS ORGIN.



SEEING WHAT OPPORTUNITIES WERE IN PROGRESS THERE, HE MOANED IN THE WINDOW RATTLED.

GARVEY WAS NOT A MAN FOR PREVARICATION. DEEDS, HE KNEW, WERE NOT BEST SERVED BY DEBATE. HE HADN'T SURE HOW THIS TREATISE ON TRANSFORMATION HAD BEEN WRITTEN INTO HIS SYSTEM, AND HE DIDN'T MUCH CARE. ALL HE COULD THINK OF WAS HOW MANY DEATHS OF SHAME HE WOULD DIE IN THIS VILE CONDITION EVER SAW THE LIGHT OF DAY.

ONLY AT THE WATER'S EDGE, HAVING COME SO FAR WITH-
OUT EXAMINING HIS INTENTIONS TOO CLOSELY, DID HEAR
OR EXTINGUISH GIVE HIM SAUCE. HE WAS A HEALTHY
AND INFLUENTIAL MAN. WERE THERE NOT OTHER ROUTES
OUT OF THE ORBITAL OTHER THAN THE ONE HE HAD COME
HEADLONG TO? PILL PEEBLES WHO COULD REVERSE THE
UNLAWY THAT HAD SEIZED HIS CELLS? SURGEONS WHO
MIGHT SLICE OFF THE OFFENDING PARTS AND KNOT HIS
LOST SELF BACK TOGETHER AGAIN?

BUT HOW LONG
WOULD SUCH
SOLUTIONS LAST?
SOONER OR LATER,
THE PROCESS
WOULD BEGIN
AGAIN. HE KNEW
IT. HE WAS
BEYOND HELP.

AT LAST HE REMEM-
BERED THE THING
THAT LIVED BEHIND
THE WATER WALL.
A CREATURE THAT
WAS WORSE THAN
ANY NIGHTMARE OF
HOMERODUS. HIS
BRIEVING AUNG HAD
DRESSED UP HIS
HAD FUCKED THERE
IN THE PRESENCE OF
THAT CREATURE, AND
IN THE FURY OF THE
ACT—WHEN HE HAD
MOMENTARILY FOR-
GOTTEN HIMSELF—
THE BITCHES HAD
WORKED THIS RAP-
TURE UPON HIM.

THE WIND WAS
COLD, BUT HIS
BLOOD WAS HOT.
IT CAME GURN-
INGLY AS HE
BLAZED AT
HIS BODY.

THE THAMES
RECEIVED THE
LIBATION WITH
ENTHUSIASM.
IT LAPPED AT
HIS FEET. IT
WHIPPED IT-
SELF INTO
EDDIES.

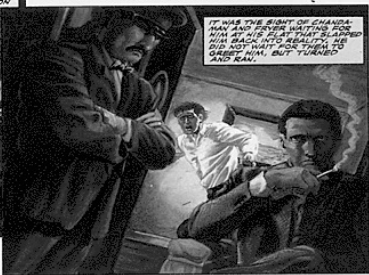
THE PRAYER HE
OFFERED UP AS
THE RIVER CLOSED
OVER HIM WAS
THAT DEATH NOT
BE A WOMAN.

NO USE FOR
REGRETS, WHAT
WAS DONE, WAS
DONE. AT LEAST
HE HAD MADE
PROVISION FOR THE DESTRU-
CTION OF THEIR
LIFE. NOW HE
WOULD UNDO BY
SELF-SURGERY
WHAT THEY HAD
CONTRIVED BY
MACH. AND SO
AT LAST BEYOND
THEIR SIGHT OF
THEIR HANDS
WORK.

LONG BEFORE GARVEY HAD AWAKENED IN THE NIGHT, AND DISCOVERED HIS BODY IN REBELLION, JERRY HAD LEFT THE POOLS, GOT INTO HIS CAR AND ATTEMPTED TO DRIVE HOME. HE HAD NOT BEEN THE EQUAL OF THAT SINGLE THEN, HOWEVER. HIS EYES WERE BLEARY, HIS SENSE OF DIRECTION CONFUSED.



HIS MEMORIES OF WHAT HAD HAPPENED TO HIM AT THE POOLS WERE BY NO MEANS CLEAR. THOUGH THE EVENTS WERE MERELY HOURS OLD, HIS HEAD WAS FULL OF STRANGE ASSOCIATIONS. HE WALKED IN THE SOLID WORLD, BUT HALF DREAMING.



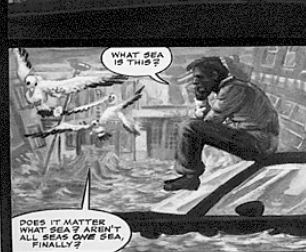
IT WAS THE SIGHT OF CHANDANAY AND FRYER WAITING FOR HIM AT HIS FLAT THAT SLAPPED HIM BACK INTO REALITY. HE DID NOT WAIT FOR THEM TO GREET HIM, BUT TURNED AND RAN.



WHERE ARE YOU GOING?

TO SEE THE YACHTS.

WHICH YACHTS ARE THOSE?



WHAT SEA IS THIS?

DOES IT MATTER WHAT SEA? AREN'T ALL SEAS ONE SEA, FINALLY?



JERRY?

WHAT THE HELL'S HAPPENED TO YOU?

I COULD HAVE DROWNED.

HE TOLD HER ABOUT THE TRAP GARVEY HAD SET AT LEOPOLD ROAD, AND OF THE THUGS' PRESENCE AT HIS OWN HOUSE. SHE OFFERED COOL SYMPATHY. HE SAID NOTHING ABOUT WHAT HE'D SEEN IN THE SHOWER ROOM. HE COULDN'T HAVE ARTICULATED IT EVEN IF HE'D WANTED TO. EVERY HOUR THAT PASSED SINCE HE'D LEFT THE POOLS HE WAS LESS CERTAIN OF HAVING SEEN ANYTHING AT ALL.



DO YOU WANT TO STAY HERE?

I THOUGHT YOU'D NEVER ASK.

YOU'D BETTER HAVE A BATH. ARE YOU SURE THEY DIDN'T BREAK ANY BONES?

I THINK I'D FEEL IT BY NOW IF THEY HAD.



NO BROKEN BONES, PERHAPS, BUT HE HAD NOT ESCAPED UNMARKED. WHEN HE GOT OUT OF THE BATH AND SURVEYED HIMSELF IN THE MIRROR, HIS BODY SEEMED TO BE PUFFED UP BY THE BEATING OF HIS SKIN OF HIS CHEST TENDER AND TIGHT. HE WAS NOT A PRETTY SIGHT.



I'D LIKE TO LOVE YOU. WHY DO YOU MAKE IT SO DIFFICULT?

DO I?

SHE WANTED TO SLIDE HER HAND SENSITIVELY UNDER THE BATHROBE HE WAS STILL WEARING -- SHE HAD NEVER QUITE UNDERSTOOD HIS COMPLEXES, BUT IT CHARMED HER -- AND CARESS HIM. BUT THERE WAS A CERTAIN INSULARITY IN THE WAY HE LAY THAT SIGNALLED HIS WHEN TO BE LEFT UNTOUCHED, AND SHE RESPECTED IT.



THE TIDE WAS NOT KIND TO GEAR GARVEY. BY EIGHT O'CLOCK HE HAD GAINED MORE THAN MOVING AS AN AUDIENCE.

JERRY WOKE TO THE SOUND OF THE SHOWER RUNNING IN THE ADJACENT BATHROOM. HE HAD A DIFFICULT DAY AHEAD, IN WHICH HE HAD TO MAKE SOME ACCOUNT OF RECENT EVENTS TO THE POLICE. THE SOONER HE GOT UP AND THOUGHT HIS STORY THROUGH, THE MORE WATER-TIGHT IT WOULD BE.



HE TRIED TO SHAKE HIMSELF AWAKE, BUT THERE WAS NOWHERE TO WAKE TO. THIS TRANSFORMED ANATOMY WAS HIS -- ITS SLIT, ITS SMOOTHNESS, ITS STRANGE HEIGHT -- ALL HIS. IN THE HOURS SINCE MIDNIGHT, HE HAD BEEN UNKITTED AND REMADE IN ANOTHER IMAGE.



FROM NEXT DOOR THE SOUND OF THE SHOWER BROUGHT THE MADONNA BACK INTO HIS HEAD, BROUGHT THE WOMAN, TOO, WHO HAD COOKED HIM INTO HER AND WHISPERED, AS HE FROWNED AND THRUST, "NEVER... NEVER..." TELLING HIM, THOUGH HE COULDN'T KNOW IT, THAT THIS COUPLED WAS HIS LAST AS A MAN.



PERHAPS THERE WERE MORE ENCHANTMENTS WHERE THIS HAD COME FROM. IF SO, HE WOULD GO BACK TO THE POOLS AND FIND THEM FOR HIMSELF; FOLLOW THE SPIRAL INTO ITS NOT HEART AND DEBATE MYSTERY WITH THE MADONNA.



I SAW...

AM I GOING MAD?

NO.

THEN WHAT'S HAPPENING?



I DON'T KNOW. IS IT SO TERRIBLE?

VILE. REVOLTING. I DON'T WANT TO LOOK AT YOU, YOU HEAR ME? I DON'T WANT TO SEE!

HE DIDN'T ATTEMPT TO ARGUE. SHE DIDN'T WANT TO KNOW HIM, AND THAT WAS HER PREROGATIVE.



WHEN HE ARRIVED AT LEOPOLD ROAD, THERE WERE SEVERAL MEN ON THE STEPS. THEY WERE TALKING, THOUGH HE DIDN'T KNOW IT, OF IMMINENT DEMOLITION.

HE HAD NOT BROUGHT A FLASH-LIGHT, BUT WHEN HE PLUNGED INTO THE Labyrinth HE TRUSTED TO HIS INSTINCT, AND IT DID NOT FORSAKE HIM.



HE HURRIED THROUGH CHAMBER AFTER CHAMBER, HIS HOPES SINKING. THE WATER STILL BRIMMED IN THE POOL, BUT ALMOST ALL ITS LIGHT HAD FLICKERED OUT. HE STUDIED THE DEPTHS. THERE WAS NO MOVEMENT IN THE DEPTHS. THEY HAD SOME, THE HOTTEST! THE CHILDREN, AND NO DOUBT, THE FIRST CAUSE. THE MADONNA.



THE WITCHES HAD GONE, AND HE, THEIR CREATURE, WAS LEFT TO END FOR HIMSELF, DEPRIVED OF THEIR MYSTERIES.



HE WANDERED ALONG THE EDGE OF THE POOL, DESPAIRING. THE SURFACE OF THE WATER WAS NOT QUITE CALM: A CIRCLE OF RIPPLES HAD GROWNED IN IT AND WAS BEATING BY THE HEARTBEAT.

SOME TRAP HAD BEEN OPENED IN THE BOTTOM OF THE POOL, AND THE WATERS WERE DRAINING AWAY, WAS THIS WHERE THE MADONNA HAD FLEW TO THE SEWERS' MOUTH, AND THEN TO THE RIVER, AND FINALLY OUT TO SEA.

TO DEATH BY DROWNING; TO THE EXTINCTION OF MAGIC, OR BY SOME SECRET CHANNEL DOWN INTO THE EARTH, TO SOME SANCTUARY SAFE FROM INQUIRY WHERE RAPTURE WAS NOT FORBIDDEN.

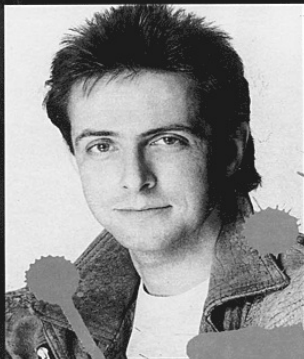
THE VORTEX WHIRLED AND FOAMED AND SPAT. HE STUDIED THE SHAPE IT DESCRIBED, A SPIRAL OF COURSE, ELEGANT AND INEVITABLE. THE WATERS WERE SINKING FAST NOW, VERY SOON IT WOULD ALL BE GONE, THE DOOR TO ANOTHER WORLD SEALED UP AND LOST.

HE HAD NO CHOICE.

THERE WAS LIGHT AHEAD, HOW FAR IT LAY, HE COULDN'T CALCULATE, BUT WHAT DID IT MATTER? IF HE DROWNED BEFORE HE REACHED THAT PLACE, SO WHAT? DEATH WAS NO MORE CERTAIN THAN THE DREAM OR REGULARITY HE'D LIVED THESE YEARS. TERMS OF DESCRIPTION FIT ONLY TO BE TURNED UP AND OVER AND INSIDE OUT.

THE EARTH WAS BRIGHT, WASN'T IT, AND PROBABLY PULL ON DARK. HE OPENED HIS MOUTH AND SPOKE INTO THE WHIRLPOOL, AS THE LIGHT GAVE AND GAVE, AN ANTHEM IN PRAISE OF PARADOX.

THE END



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